CONTEMPLATIONS

ON THE

HISTORICAL PASSAGES

OF THE

OLD AND NEW

TESTAMENTS.

BY

The Right Reverend Father in God,

JOSEPH HALL,

Late Lord Biſhop of NORWICH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE CONTENTS OF THE HISTORICAL PASSAGES IN THE SECOND VOLUME.

BOOK XV.

I. UZZIAH, and the Ark removed 1
II. Mephibosheth and Ziba 9
III. Hanun, and David's ambassadors 15
IV. David with Bathsheba, and Uria 22
V. Nathan and David 30
VI. Amnon and Tamar 38
VII. Absalom's return and conspiracy 45

BOOK XVI.

I. Shimei curfing 52
II. Achitophel 58
III. The death of Absalom 64
IV. Sheba's rebellion 72
V. The Gibeonites revenged 79
VI. The numbering of the people 85

BOOK XVII.

I. Adonijah defeated 93
II. David's end, and Solomon's beginning 100
III. The execution of Joab and Shimei 107
IV. Solomon's choice, with his judgment upon the two harlots 112
V. The temple 118
VI. Solomon and the queen of Sheba 125
VII. Solomon's defection 131

BOOK XVIII.

I. Rehoboam 138
II. Jeroboam 147
III. The seduced prophet 156
IV. Jeroboam's wife 164
V. Asa 171
VI. Elijah with the Sareptan 179
VII. Elijah with the Baalites 190
VIII. Elijah running before Ahab, fleeing from Jezebel 201

BOOK XIX.

I. Ahab and Benhadad 213
II. Ahab and Naboth 223
III. Ahab and Micaiah, or the death of Ahab 232
IV. Ahaziah sick, and Elijah revenged 242
V. The rapture of Elijah 251
VI. Elisha healing the waters,—Curfing the children,—Relieving the kings 262
VII. Elisha with the Shunamite 274

VIII. Elisha

VIII. Eliſha with Naaman 285
IX. Eliſha raiſing the iron, blinding the Aſſyrians 300
X. The famine of Samaria relieved 309

BOOK XX.

I. The Shunamite ſuing to Jehoram,--Eliſha conferring with Hazael 317
II. Jehu with Jehoram and Jezebel 327
III. Jehu killing the ſons of Ahab, and the prieſts of Baal 338
IV. Athaliah and Joaſh 348
V. Joaſh with Eliſha dying 359
VI. Uzziah leprous 366
VII. Ahaz with his new altar 373
VIII. The utter deſtruction of the kingdom of Iſrael 377
IX. Hezekiah and Sennacherib 381
X. Hezekiah ſick, recovered, viſited 393
XI. Manaſſeh 404
XII. Joſiah's reformation 414
XIII. Joſiah's death, with deſolation of the temple, and Jeruſalem 417

BOOK XXI.

I. Zerubbabel and Ezra 431
II. Nehemiah building the walls of Jeruſalem 448
III. Nehemiah redreſſing the extortion of the Jews 458
IV. Ahaſuerus feaſting,—Vaſhti caſt off,—Eſther choſen 467
V. Haman diſreſpected by Mordecai,—Mordecai's meſſage to Eſther 478
VI. Eſther ſuing to Ahaſuerus 493
VII. Mordecai honoured by Haman 498
VIII. Haman hanged, Mordecai advanced 505

End of the CONTENTS of the OLD TESTAMENT.

CON-

CONTEMPLATIONS.

BOOK FIFTEENTH.

CONTEM. I. UZZAH, *and the ark removed.*

THE houſe of *Saul* is quiet, the *Philiſtines* beaten; victory cannot end better than in devotion: *David* is no ſooner ſettled in his houſe at *Jeruſalem*, than he fetcheth God to be his gueſt there; the thouſands of *Iſrael* go now, in an holy march, to bring up the ark of God to the place of his reſt. The tumults of war afforded no opportunity of this ſervice; only peace is a friend to religion; neither is peace ever our friend, but when it is a ſervant of piety. The uſe of war is not more pernicious to the body, than the abuſe of peace is to the ſoul: alas! the riot, bred of our long eaſe, rather drives the ark of God from us; ſo the ſtill ſedentary life is ſubject to diſeaſes, and ſtanding waters putrify. It may be juſt with God to take away the bleſſing, which we do ſo much abuſe, and to ſcour off our ruſt with bloody war, *&c.*

The ark of God had now many years reſted in the obſcure lodge of *Abinadab*, without the honour of a tabernacle. *David* will not endure himſelf glorious, and the ark of God contemptible; his firſt care is to provide a fit room for God, in the head of the tribes, in his own city. The chief care of good princes muſt be the advancement of religion; what ſhould the deputies of God rather do, than honour him whom they repreſent? It was no good that *Iſrael* could learn of *Philiſtines;* thoſe Pagans had ſent the ark back in a new cart; the *Iſraelites* ſaw God bleſſed that conduct, and now they practiſe it at home: but that which God will take from *Philiſtines*, he will not brook from

Iſrael. Aliens from God are no fit patterns for children. Divine inſtitution had made this a carriage for the *Levites*, not for oxen: neither ſhould thoſe ſons of *Abinadab* have driven the cart, but carried that ſacred burden. God's buſineſſes muſt be done after his own forms, which if we do, with the beſt intentions, alter, we preſume.

It is long ſince *Iſrael* ſaw ſo fair a day as this, wherein they went, in this holy triumph, to fetch the ark of God: now their warlike trumpets are turned into harps and timbrels; and their hands, inſtead of wielding the ſword and ſpear, ſtrike upon thoſe muſical ſtrings, whereby they might expreſs the joy of their hearts; here was no noiſe but of mirth, no motion but pleaſant. O happy *Iſrael*, that had a God to rejoice in, that had this occaſion of rejoicing in their God, and an heart that embraced this occaſion! There is nothing but this wherein we may not joy immoderately, unſeaſonably; this ſpiritual joy can never be either out of time, or out of meaſure. *Let him that rejoiceth, rejoice in the Lord.* But now, when the *Iſraelites* were in the midſt of this angel-like jollity, their hearts lifted up, their hands playing, their feet moving, their tongues ſinging and ſhouting, God ſees good to ſtrike them into a ſudden dump by the death of *Uzzah*. They are ſcarce ſet into the tune, when God mars their muſic, by a fearful judgment, and changes their mirth into aſtoniſhment and confuſion: there could not be a more excellent work than this they were about; there could not be more cheerful hearts in the performing of it: yet will the moſt holy God rather daſh all this ſolemn ſervice, than endure an act of preſumption or infidelity. *Abinadab* had been the faithful hoſt of God's ark for the ſpace of twenty years: even in the midſt of the terrors of *Iſrael*, who were juſtly affrighted with the vengeance inflicted upon *Beth-ſhemeſh*, did he give harbour unto

unto it; yet even the ſon of *Abinadab* is ſtricken dead, in the firſt departing of that bleſſed gueſt. The ſanctity of the parent cannot bear out the ſin of his ſon. The Holy One of *Iſrael* will be ſanctified in all that come near him; he will be ſerved like himſelf.

What then was the ſin of *Uzzah?* what was the capital crime for which he ſo fearfully periſhed? That the ark of God was committed to the cart, it was not his device only, but the common act of many; that it was not carried on the ſhoulders of *Levites*, was no leſs the fault of *Ahio*, and the reſt of their brethren. Only *Uzzah* is ſtricken: the reſt ſinned in negligence, he in preſumption; the ark of God ſhakes with the agitation of that carriage, he puts forth his hand to hold it ſteady; human judgment would have found herein nothing heinous. God ſees not with the eyes of men; none but the prieſts ſhould have dared to touch the ark; it was enough for the *Levites* to touch the bars that carried it; an unwarranted hand cannot ſo lightly touch the ark, but he ſtrikes the God that dwells in it. No marvel, if God ſtrike that man with death, that ſtrikes him with preſumption; there was well-near the ſame quarrel againſt the thouſands of *Beth-ſhemeſh*, and againſt *Uzzah;* they died for looking into the ark, he for touching it; leſt *Iſrael* ſhould grow into a contemptuous familiarity with this teſtimony of God's preſence, he will hold them in awe with judgments. The revenging hand of the Almighty, that, upon the return of the ark, ſtaid at the houſe of *Abinadab*, upon the remove of the ark, begins there again. Where are thoſe that think God will take up with a careleſs and ſlubbered ſervice? He, whoſe infinite mercy uſes to paſs by our ſins of infirmity, puniſheth yet ſeverely our bold faults. If we cannot do any thing in the degrees that he requireth, yet we muſt learn to do all things in the form that he requireth: doubtleſs *Uzzah* meant no other-

ways than well, in putting forth his hand to ſtay the ark; he knew the ſacred utenſils that were in it, the pot of manna, the tables of the law, the rod of *Aaron*, which might be wronged by that over-rough motion; to theſe he offers his aid, and is ſtricken dead; the beſt intention cannot excuſe, much leſs warrant us, in unlawful actions. Where we do ought in faith, it pleaſes our good God to wink at, and pity our weakneſſes; but, if we dare to preſent God with the well-meant ſervices of our own making, we run into the indignation of God. There is nothing more dangerous, than to be our own carvers in matters of devotion.

I marvel not, if the countenance of *David* were ſuddenly changed, to ſee the pale face of death in one of the chief actors in this holy proceſſion. He, that had found God ſo favourable to him in actions of leſs worth, is troubled to ſee this ſucceſs of a buſineſs ſo heartily directed unto his God; and now he begins to look through *Uzzah* at himſelf, and to ſay, *How ſhall the ark of the Lord come to me?* Then only ſhall we make a right uſe of the judgments of God upon others, when we ſhall fear them in ourſelves, and, finding our ſins at leaſt equal, ſhall tremble at the expectation of the ſame deſerved puniſhments. God intends not only revenge in his execution, but reformation; as good princes regard not ſo much the ſmart of the evil paſt, as the prevention of the future, which is never attained, but when we make applications of God's hand, and draw common cauſes out of God's particular proceedings.

I do not hear *David* ſay, Surely this man is guilty of ſome ſecret ſin that the world knows not; God hath met with him, there is no danger to us; why ſhould I be diſcouraged to ſee God juſt? We may go on ſafely and proſper. But here his foot ſtays, and his hand falls from his inſtrument, and his tongue is ready to tax his own unworthineſs; *How ſhall the ark*

ark of the Lord come unto me? That heart is carnal and proud, that thinks any man worſe than himſelf. *David*'s fear ſtays his progreſs; perhaps he might have proceeded with good ſucceſs, but he dares not venture, where he ſees ſuch a deadly check. It is better to be too fearful, than too forward, in thoſe affairs which do immediately concern God. As it is not good to refrain from holy buſineſſes, ſo it is worſe to do them ill; awfulneſs is a ſafe interpreter of God's ſecret actions, and a wiſe guide of ours.

This event hath holpen *Obed-edom* to a gueſt he looked not for; God ſhall now ſojourn in the houſe of him, in whoſe heart he dwelt before by a ſtrong faith, elſe the man durſt not have undertaken to receive that dreadful ark, which *David* himſelf feared to harbour. O the courage of an honeſt and faithful heart! *Obed-edom* knew well enough what ſlaughter the ark had made among the *Philiſtines*, and after that among the *Beth-ſhemites*, and now he ſaw *Uzzah* ly dead before him; yet doth he not make any ſcruple of entertaining it; neither doth he ſay, My neighbour *Abinadab* was a careful and religious hoſt to the ark, and is now paid with the blood of his ſon; how ſhall I hope to ſpeed better? but he opens his doors with a bold cheerfulneſs, and, notwithſtanding all thoſe terrors, bids God welcome. Nothing can make God not amiable to his own; even his very juſtice is lovely. Holy men know how to rejoice in the Lord with trembling, and can fear without diſcouragement.

The God of heaven will not receive any thing from men on free coſt; he will pay liberally for his lodging, a plentiful bleſſing upon *Obed-edom*, and all his houſhold. It was an honour to that zealous *Gittite*, that the ark ſhould come under his roof; yet God rewards that honour with benediction: never man was a loſer by true godlineſs. The houſe of *Obed-edom* cannot this while want obſervation; the eyes of *David*

vid and all *Iſrael* were never off from it, to ſee how it fared with this entertainment. And now, when they find nothing but a gracious acceptation and ſenſible bleſſing, the good king of *Iſrael* takes new heart, and haſtens to fetch the ark into his royal city. The view of God's favours upon the godly, is no ſmall encouragement to confidence and obedience. Doubtleſs, *Obed-edom* was not free from ſome weakneſſes: if the Lord ſhould have taken the advantage of judgment againſt him, what *Iſraelites* had not been diſheartened from attending the ark? Now *David* and *Iſrael* were not more affrighted with the vengeance upon *Uzzah*, than encouraged by the bleſſing of *Obed-edom*. The wiſe God doth ſo order his juſt and merciful proceedings, that the awfulneſs of men may be tempered with love. Now the ſweet ſinger of *Iſrael* revives his holy muſic, and adds both more ſpirit and more pomp to ſo devout a buſineſs. I did not before hear of trumpets, nor dancing, nor ſhouting, nor ſacrifice, nor the linen ephod. The ſenſe of God's paſt diſpleaſure doubles our care to pleaſe him, and our joy in his recovered approbation; we never make ſo much of our health as after ſickneſs, nor never are ſo officious to our friend as after an unkindneſs. In the firſt ſetting out of the ark, *David*'s fear was at leaſt an equal match to his joy; therefore, after the firſt ſix paces, he offered a ſacrifice, both to pacify God and thank him: but now when they ſaw no ſign of diſlike, they did more freely let themſelves looſe to a fearleſs joy, and the body ſtrove to expreſs the holy affection of the ſoul; there was no limb, no part that did not profeſs their mirth by motion, no noiſe of voice or inſtrument wanted to aſſiſt their ſpiritual jollity: *David* led the way, dancing with all his might in his linen ephod. *Uzzah* was ſtill in his eye, he durſt not uſurp upon a garment of prieſts, but will borrow their colour to grace the ſolemnity, though he

he dare not the faſhion. White was ever the colour of joy, and linen was light for uſe: therefore he covers his princely robes with white linen, and means to honour himſelf by his conformity to God's miniſters. Thoſe, that think there is diſgrace in the ephod, are far from the ſpirit of the man after God's own heart: neither can there be a greater argument of a foul ſoul, than a diſlike of the glorious calling of God. Barren *Michal* hath too many ſons that ſcorn the holy habit and exerciſes. She looks through her window, and, ſeeing the attire and geſtures of her devout huſband, deſpiſeth him in her heart, neither can ſhe conceal her contempt, but, like *Saul*'s daughter, caſts it proudly in his face: *O how glorious was the king of* Iſrael *this day, which was uncovered this day in the eyes of the maidens of his ſervants, as a fool uncovereth himſelf!* Worldly hearts can ſee nothing in actions of zeal, but folly and madneſs. Piety hath no reliſh to their palate, but diſtaſteful.

David's heart did never ſwell ſo much at any reproach, as this of his wife; his love was for the time loſt in his anger; and, as a man impatient of no affront ſo much as in the way of his devotion, he returns a bitter check to his *Michal; It was before the Lord, which choſe me rather than thy father, and all his houſe*, &c. Had not *Michal* twitted her huſband with the ſhame of his zeal, ſhe had not heard of the ſhameful rejection of her father; now, ſince ſhe will be forgetting whoſe wife ſhe was, ſhe ſhall be put in mind whoſe daughter ſhe was. Contumelies, that are caſt upon us in the cauſes of God, may ſafely be repaid. If we be meal-mouthed in the ſcorns of religion, we are not patient, but zealleſs: here we may not forbear her that lies in our boſom. If *David* had not loved *Michal* dearly, he had never ſtood upon thoſe points with *Abner:* he knew, that if *Abner* came to him, the kingdom of *Iſrael* would accompany

company him; and yet he ſends him the charge of not ſeeing his face, except he brought *Michal*, *Saul*'s daughter, with him; as if he would not regard the crown of *Iſrael*, while he wanted that wife of his: yet here he takes her up roundly, as if ſhe had been an enemy, not a partner of his bed. All relations are aloof off, in compariſon of that betwixt God and the ſoul. *He that loves father or mother, or wife, or child, better than me*, (ſaith our Saviour) *is not worthy of me*. Even the higheſt delights of our hearts muſt be trampled upon, when they will ſtand out in rivalry with God. O happy reſolution of the royal prophet, and prophetical king of *Iſrael*! *I will be yet more vile than thus, and will be low in mine own ſight*. He knew this very abaſement heroical; and that the only way to true glory, is not to be aſhamed of our loweſt humiliation unto God. Well might he promiſe himſelf honour from thoſe whoſe contempt ſhe had threatened. The hearts of men are not their own; he that made them over-rules them, and inclines them to an honourable conceit of thoſe that honour their Maker: ſo as holy men have oft-times inward reverence, even where they have outward indignities. *David* came to bleſs his houſe, *Michal* brings a curſe upon herſelf: her ſcorns ſhall make her childleſs to the day of her death. Barrenneſs was held in thoſe times none of the leaſt judgments. God doth ſo revenge *David*'s quarrel upon *Michal*, that her ſudden diſgrace ſhall be recompenſed with perpetual: ſhe ſhall not be held worthy to bear a ſon to him whom ſhe unjuſtly contemned. How juſt is it with God to provide whips for the backs of ſcorners! It is no marvel, if thoſe that mock at goodneſs be plagued with continual fruitleſneſs.

CONTEM. II. MEPHIBOSHETH *and* ZIBA.

SO ſoon as ever *David* can but breathe himſelf from the public cares, he caſts back his thoughts to to the dear remembrance of his *Jonathan*. *Saul*'s ſervant is likely to give him the beſt intelligence of *Saul*'s ſons: the queſtion is therefore moved to *Ziba*, *Remaineth there none of the houſe of* Saul? And, leſt ſuſpicion might conceal the remainders of an emulous line, in fear of revenge intended, he adds, *On whom I may ſhew the mercy of God for* Jonathan's *ſake?* O friendſhip worthy of the monuments of eternity; fit only to requite him whoſe love was more than the love of women! He doth not ſay, is there any of the houſe of *Jonathan*, but of *Saul;* that, for his friend's ſake, he may ſhew favour to the poſterity of his perſecutor. *Jonathan*'s love could not be greater than *Saul*'s malice, which alſo ſurvived long in his iſſue, from whom *David* found a buſy and ſtubborn rivality for the crown of *Iſrael;* yet, as one that gladly buried all the hoſtility of *Saul*'s houſe in *Jonathan*'s grave, he aſks, *Is there any man left of* Saul's *houſe, that I may ſhew him mercy for* Jonathan's *ſake?* It is true love, that, overliving the perſon of a friend, will be inherited of his ſeed; but to love the poſterity of an enemy in a friend, it is a miracle of friendſhip. The formal amity of the world is confined to a face, or to the poſſibility of recompenſe languiſhing in the diſability, and dying in the deceaſe of the party affected. That love was ever falſe that is not ever conſtant, and the moſt operative when it cannot be either known or requited.

To cut off all unquiet competition for the kingdom of *Iſrael*, the providence of God had ſo ordered, that there is none left of the houſe of *Saul*, beſides the ſons of his concubines, ſave only young and lame *Mephiboſheth;* ſo young, that he was but five years of

age, when *David* entered upon the government of *Iſrael*; ſo lame, that, if his age had fitted, his impotency had made him unfit for the throne. *Mephibo-ſheth* was not born a cripple, it was an heedleſs nurſe that made him ſo. She hearing of the death of *Saul* and *Jonathan*, made ſuch haſte to fly, that her young maſter was lamed with the fall. Certainly there needed no ſuch ſpeed to run away from *David*, whoſe love purſues the hidden ſon of his brother *Jonathan*. How often doth our ignorant miſtaking, cauſe us to run from our beſt friends, and to catch knocks and maims of them that profeſs our protection!

Mephibo-ſheth could not come otherways than fearfully into the preſence of *David*, whom he knew ſo long, ſo ſpitefully oppoſed by the houſe of *Saul*. He could not be ignorant, that the faſhion of the world is to build their own ſecurity upon the blood of the oppoſite faction; neither to think themſelves ſafe, while any branch remains ſpringing out of that root of their emulation. Seaſonably doth *David* therefore firſt expel all thoſe unjuſt doubts, ere he adminiſter his further cordials; *Fear not, for I will ſurely ſhew thee kindneſs for* Jonathan *thy father's ſake, and will reſtore thee all the fields of* Saul *thy father, and thou ſhalt eat bread at my table continually.*

David can ſee neither *Saul*'s blood, nor lame legs in *Mephibo-ſheth*, while he ſees in him the features of his friend *Jonathan*: how much leſs ſhall the God of mercies regard our infirmities, or the corrupt blood of our ſinful progenitors, while he beholds us in the face of his Son, in whom he is well pleaſed.

Favours are wont ſo much more to affect us, as they are leſs expected by us. *Mephibo-ſheth*, as overjoyed with ſo comfortable a word, and confounded in himſelf at the remembrance of the contrary deſervings of his family, bows himſelf to the earth, and ſays, *What is thy ſervant, that thou ſhouldſt look upon ſuch a dead*

dead dog as I am? I find no defect of wit, though of limbs, in *Mephibosheth*, he knew himself the grandchild of the king of *Israel*, the son of *Jonathan*, the lawful heir of both; yet in regard of his own impotency, and the trespass and rejection of his house, he thus abaseth himself unto *David*. Humiliation is a right use of God's affliction. What if he was born great? If the sin of his grandfather hath lost his estate, and the hand of his nurse hath deformed and disabled his person, he now forgets what he was, and calls himself worse than he is, *A dog*. Yet, *A living dog is better than a dead lion*. There is dignity and comfort in life; *Mephibosheth* is therefore a dead dog unto *David*. It is not for us to nourish the same spirits in our adverse estate, that we found in our highest prosperity. What use have we made of God's hand, if we be not the lower with our fall? God intends we should carry our cross, not make a fire of it to warm us: it is no bearing up our sails in a tempest. Good *David* cannot dis-esteem *Mephibosheth* ever the more for disparaging himself; he loves and honours this humility in the son of *Jonathan*. There is no more certain way to glory and advancement, than a lowly dejection of ourselves. He that made himself a dog, and therefore fit only to ly under the table, yea a dead dog, and therefore fit only for the ditch, is raised up to the table of a king; his seat shall be honourable, yea royal, his fare delicious, his attendance noble. How much more will our gracious God lift up our heads unto true honour before men and angels, if we can be sincerely humbled in his sight? If we miscal ourselves in the meanness of our conceits to him, he gives us a new name, and sets us at the table of his glory. It is contrary with God and men; if they reckon of us as we set ourselves, he values us according to our abasements. Like a prince truly munificent and faithful, *David*

promiſes and performs at once: *Ziba*, *Saul*'s ſervant, hath the charge given him of the execution of that royal word; *He ſhall be the bailiff of this great husbandry of his maſter* Mephiboſheth. The land of *Saul*, however forfeited, ſhall know no other maſter than *Saul*'s grand-child. As yet, *Saul*'s ſervant had ſped better than his ſon. I read of twenty ſervants of *Ziba*, none of *Mephiboſheth*. Earthly poſſeſſions do not always admit of equal diviſions. The wheel is now turned up, *Mephiboſheth* is a prince, *Ziba* is his officer. I cannot but pity the condition of this good ſon of *Jonathan*: into ill hands did honeſt *Mephiboſheth* fall, firſt of a careleſs nurſe, then of a treacherous ſervant; ſhe maimed his body, he would have overthrown his eſtate. After ſome years of eye-ſervice to *Mephiboſheth*, wicked *Ziba* intends to give him a worſe fall than his nurſe. Never any court was free from detracters, from delators, who, if they ſee a man to be a cripple, that he cannot go to ſpeak for himſelf, will be telling tales of him in the ears of the great: ſuch an one was this perfidious *Ziba*, who, taking the opportunity of *David*'s flight from his ſon *Abſalom*, follows him with a fair preſent, and a falſe tale, accuſing his impotent maſter of a foul and traiterous ingratitude, labouring to tread upon his lame lord, to raiſe himſelf to honour. True-hearted *Mephiboſheth* had as good a will as the beſt; if he could have commanded legs, he had not been left behind *David*: now, that he cannot go with him, he will not be well without him, and therefore puts himſelf to a wilful and ſullen penance, for the abſence and danger of his king; he will not ſo much as put on clean clothes for the time, as he that could not have any joy in himſelf for the want of his lord *David*. Unconſcionable miſcreants care not how they collogue, whom they ſlander for a private advantage. Lewd *Ziba* comes with a gift in his hand, and a ſmooth tale

in

in his mouth: O ſir, you thought you had a *Jonathan* at home, but you will find a *Saul*; it were pity but he ſhould be ſet at your table, that would ſit in your throne! You thought *Saul*'s land would have contented *Mephiboſheth*, but he would have all yours; though he be lame, yet he would be climbing: would you have thought that this cripple could be plotting for your kingdom, now that you are gone aſide? *Iſhboſheth* will never die while *Mephiboſheth* lives. How did he now forget his impotence, and raiſed up his ſpirits in hope of a day; and durſt ſay, that now the time was come, wherein the crown ſhould revert to *Saul*'s true heir. O viper! if a ſerpent bite in ſecret when he is not charmed, no better is a ſlanderer. Honeſt *Mephiboſheth*, in good manners, made a dead dog of himſelf, when *David* offered him the favour of his board; but *Ziba* would make him a very dog indeed, an ill-natured cur, that, when *David* did thus kindly feed him at his own table, would not only bite his fingers, but fly at his throat.

But what ſhall we ſay to this? Neither earthly ſovereignty, nor holineſs, can exempt men from human infirmity. Wiſe and good *David* hath now but one ear, and that miſled with credulity. His charity in believing *Ziba*, makes him uncharitable in diſtrutting, in cenſuring *Mephiboſheth*. The detractor hath not only ſudden credit given him, but *Saul*'s land. *Jonathan*'s ſon hath loſt (unheard) that inheritance which was given him unſought. Hearſay is no ſafe ground of any judgment: *Ziba* ſlanders, *David* believes, *Mephiboſheth* ſuffers.

Lies ſhall not always proſper: God will not abide the truth to be ever oppreſſed. At laſt *Jonathan*'s lame ſon ſhall be found as ſound in heart as lame in his body; he, whoſe ſoul was like his father *Jonathan*'s ſoul, whoſe body was like to his grandfather *Saul*'s ſoul, meets *David*, as it was high time, upon his

his return, beſtirs his tongue to diſcharge himſelf of ſo foul a ſlander; the more horrible the crime had been, the more villanous was the unjuſt ſuggeſtion of it, and the more neceſſary was a juſt apology; ſweetly therefore, and yet paſſionately doth he labour to greaten *David*'s favours to him, his own obligations and vileneſs; ſhewing himſelf more affected with his wrong, than with his loſs; welcoming *David* home with a thankful neglect of himſelf, as not caring that *Ziba* had his ſubſtance, now that he had his king. *David* is ſatisfied, *Mephiboſheth* reſtored to favour and lands: here are two kind hearts well met. *David* is full of ſatisfaction from *Mephiboſheth*; *Mephiboſheth* runs over with joy in *David*: *David*, like a gracious king, gives *Mephiboſheth*, as before, *Saul*'s lands to halves with *Ziba*; *Mephiboſheth* like a king, gives all to *Ziba*, for joy that God had given him *David*; all had been well, if *Ziba* had fared worſe. Pardon me, O holy and glorious ſoul of a prophet, of a king, after God's own heart, I muſt needs blame thee for mercy; a fault that the beſt and moſt generous natures are moſt ſubject to: it is pity that ſo good a thing ſhould do hurt; yet we find that the beſt, miſuſed, is moſt dangerous. Who ſhould be the pattern of kings, but the King of God? Mercy is the goodlieſt flower in his crown, much more in theirs, but with a difference. God's mercy is infinite, theirs limited; he ſays, *I will have mercy on whom I will:* they muſt ſay, I will have mercy on whom I ſhould. And yet he, for all his infinite mercy, hath veſſels of wrath, ſo muſt they; of whom his juſtice hath ſaid, *Thine eye ſhall not ſpare them.* A good man is pitiful to his beaſt; ſhall he therefore make much of toads and ſnakes! O that *Ziba* ſhould go away with any poſſeſſion, ſave of ſhame and ſorrow, that he ſhould be coupled with a *Mephiboſheth* in a partner-

partnerſhip of eſtates! O that *David* had changed the word a little!

A diviſion was due here indeed; but of *Ziba*'s ears from his head, or his head from his ſhoulders, for going about ſo maliciouſly to divide *David* from the ſon of *Jonathan*: an eye for an eye was God's rule. If that had been true, which *Ziba* ſuggeſted againſt *Mephiboſheth*, he had been worthy to loſe his head with his lands; being falſe, it had been but reaſon *Ziba* ſhould have changed heads with *Mephiboſheth*. Had not holy *David* himſelf been ſo ſtung with venomous tongues, that he cries out, in the bitterneſs of his ſoul, *What reward ſhall be given thee, O thou falſe tongue! even ſharp arrows with hot burning coals.* He that was ſo ſenſible of himſelf in *Doeg*'s wrong, doth he feel ſo little of *Mephiboſheth* in *Ziba*'s? Are theſe the arrows of *David*'s quiver? are theſe his hot burning coals? *Thou and* Ziba *divide.* He that had ſaid, Their tongue is a ſharp ſword; now, that the ſword of juſt revenge is in his hand, is this the blow he gives? *Divide the poſſeſſion.* I know not whether exceſs or want of mercy may prove moſt dangerous in the great; the one diſcourages good intentions with fear, the other may encourage wicked practices through preſumption; thoſe that are in eminent place muſt learn the mid-way betwixt both; ſo pardoning faults, that they may not provoke them; ſo puniſhing them, that they may not diſhearten virtuous and well-meant actions; they muſt learn to ſing that abſolute ditty, whereof *David* had here forgotten one part, of mercy and judgment.

CONTEM. III. HANUN *and* DAVID'S *ambaſſadors.*

IT is not the meaning of religion to make men uncivil. If the king of *Ammon* were heatheniſh, yet his kindneſs may be acknowledged, may be returned

ed by the king of *Iſrael*. I ſay not, but that perhaps *David* might maintain too ſtrait a league with that forbidden nation. A little friendſhip is enough to an idolater; but even the ſavage *Cannibals* may receive an anſwer of outward courteſy. If a very dog fawn upon us, we ſtroke him on the head, and clap him on the ſide; much leſs is the common band of humanity untied by grace. Diſparity, in ſpiritual profeſſions, is no warrant for ingratitude. He therefore, whoſe good nature proclaimed to ſhew mercy to any branch of *Saul*'s houſe for *Jonathan*'s ſake, will now alſo ſhew kindneſs to *Hanun*, for the ſake of *Nahaſh* his father.

It was the ſame *Nahaſh* that offered the cruel condition to the men of *Jabeſh-Gilead*, of thruſting out their right eyes for the admiſſion into his covenant. He that was thus bloody in his deſigns againſt *Iſrael*, yet was kind to *David*; perhaps for no cauſe ſo much as *Saul*'s oppoſition; and yet even this favour is held worthy both of memory and retribution. Where we have the acts of courteſy, it is not neceſſary we ſhould enter into a ſtrict examination of the grounds of it; while the benefit is ours, let the intention be their own. Whatever the hearts of men are, we muſt look at their hands, and repay, not what they meant, but what they did.

Nahaſh is dead, *David* ſends ambaſſadors to condole his loſs, and to comfort his ſon *Hanun*. No *Ammonite* but is ſadly affected with the death of a father, though it gain him a kingdom. Even *Eſau* could ſay, *The days of mourning for my father will come;* no earthly advantage can fill up the gap of nature. Thoſe children are worſe than *Ammonites*, that can think either gain or liberty worthy to countervail a parent's loſs.

Carnal men are wont to meaſure another's foot by their own laſt; their own falſhood makes them unjuſtly

juſtly ſuſpicious of others. The princes of *Ammon*, becauſe they are guilty to their own hollowneſs and doubleneſs of heart, are ready ſo to judge of *David* and his meſſengers; *Thinkeſt thou that* David *doth honour thy father, that he hath ſent comforters unto thee? Hath not* David *rather ſent his own ſervants to thee to ſearch the city, and to ſpie it out, to overthrow it.* It is hard for a wicked heart to think well of any other; becauſe it can think none better than itſelf, and knows itſelf evil. The freer a man is from vice himſelf, the more charitable he uſes to be unto others.

Whatſoever *David* was, particularly in his own perſon, it was ground enough of prejudice, that he was an *Iſraelite*. It was an hereditary and deep ſettled hatred that the *Ammonites* had conceived againſt their brethren of *Iſrael;* neither can they forget that ſhameful and fearful foil which they received from the reſcuers of *Jabeſh-Gilead;* and now ſtill do they ſtomach at the name of *Iſrael*. Malice, once conceived in worldly hearts, is not eaſily extinguiſhed, but, upon all occaſions, is ready to break forth into a flame of revengeful actions.

Nothing can be more dangerous, than for young princes to meet with ill counſel in the entrance of their government; for both then are they more prone to take it, and moſt difficultly recovered from it: if we be ſet out of our way in the beginning of our journey, we wander all the day. How happy is that ſtate, where both the counſellors are faithful to give only good advice, and the king wiſe to diſcern good advice from evil. The young king of *Ammon* is eaſily drawn to believe his peers, and to miſtruſt the meſſengers; and having now, in his conceit, turned them into ſpies, entertains them with a ſcornful diſgrace; he ſhaves off one half of their beards, and cuts off one half of their garments, expoſing them to the

deriſion of all beholders. The *Iſraelites* were forbidden either a ſhaven beard, or a ſhort garment; in deſpite, perhaps, of their law, theſe ambaſſadors are ſent away with both; certainly in a deſpite of their maſter, and a ſcorn of their perſons.

King *David* is not a little ſenſible of the abuſe of his meſſengers, and of himſelf in them; firſt therefore he deſires to hide their ſhame, then to revenge it. Man hath but a double ornament of body, the one of nature, the other of art; the natural ornament is the hair, the artificial is apparel; *David*'s meſſengers are deformed in both: the one is eaſily ſupplied by a new ſuit, the other can only be ſupplied out of the wardrobe of time; *Tarry at* Jericho *till your beards be grown.* How eaſily had this deformity been removed, if, as *Hanun* had ſhaven one ſide of their faces, ſo they had ſhaven the other? What had this been but to reſemble their younger age, or that other ſex, in neither of which do we uſe to place any imagination of unbeſeeming? Neither did there want ſome of their neighbour nations, whoſe faces age itſelf had not wont to cover with this ſhade of hair. But ſo reſpective is good *David*, and his wiſe ſenators, of their country forms, that they ſhall, by appointment, rather tarry abroad, till time have wrought their conformity, than vary from the received faſhions of their own people. Alas, into what a licentious variety of ſtrange diſguiſes are we fallen! The glory of attire is ſought in novelty, in miſhapenneſs, in monſtrouſneſs: there is much latitude, much liberty in the uſe of theſe indifferent things; but, becauſe we are free, we may not run wild, and never think we have ſcope enough, unleſs we out-run modeſty.

It is lawful for public perſons to feel their own indignities, and to endeavour their revenge. Now, *David* ſends all the hoſt of the mighty men to puniſh *Ammon* for ſo foul an abuſe. Thoſe, that received the meſſengers

meſſengers of his love with ſcorn and inſolency, ſhall now be ſeverely ſaluted with the meſſengers of his wrath. It is juſt both with God and men, that they, who know not how to take favours aright, ſhould ſmart with judgments. Kindneſs repulſed breaks forth into indignation; how much more, when it is repaid with an injurious affront!

David cannot but feel his own cheeks ſhaven, and his own coat cut in his ambaſſadors; they did but carry his perſon to *Hanun;* neither can he therefore but appropriate to himſelf the kindneſs or injury offered unto them. He that did ſo take to heart the cutting off but the lap of king *Saul*'s garment, when it was laid aſide from him, how muſt he needs be affected with this diſdainful halving of his hair and robes in the perſon of his deputies! The name of ambaſſadors hath ever been ſacred, and, by the univerſal law of nations, hath carried in it ſufficient protection from all public wrongs; neither hath it been violated without a revenge. O God, what ſhall we ſay to thoſe notorious contempts, which are daily caſt upon thy ſpiritual meſſengers! Is it poſſible thou ſhouldſt not feel them, thou ſhouldſt not avenge them? We are made a gazing ſtock to the world, to angels and to men; we are deſpiſed and trodden down in the duſt! *Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?*

How obſtinate are wicked men in their perverſe reſolutions! Thoſe fooliſh *Ammonites* had rather hire *Syrians* to maintain a war againſt *Iſrael* in ſo foul a quarrel, beſides the hazard of their own lives, than confeſs the error of their jealous miſconſtruction.

It is one of the mad principles of wickedneſs, that it is a weakneſs to relent, and rather to die than yield. Even ill cauſes, once undertaken, muſt be upheld, although with blood; whereas the gracious heart, finding his own miſtaking, doth not only remit

of an ungrounded diſpleaſure, but ſtudies to be revenged of itſelf, and to give ſatisfaction to the offended.

The mercenary *Syrians* are drawn to venture their lives for a fee; twenty thouſand of them are hired into the field againſt *Iſrael*. Fond Pagans, that know not the value of a man; their blood coſt them nothing, and they care not to ſell it good-cheap! How can we think thoſe men have ſouls, that eſteem a little white earth above themſelves? that never inquire into the juſtice of the quarrel, but the rate of the pay? that can riſle for drams of ſilver in the bowels of their own fleſh, and either kill or die for a day's wages?

Joab, the wiſe general of *Iſrael*, ſoon finds where the ſtrength of the battle lay, and ſo marſhals his troops, that the choice of his men ſhall encounter the van-guard of the *Syrians*. His brother *Abiſhai* leads the reſt againſt the children of *Ammon*, with this covenant of mutual aſſiſtance, *If the* Syrians *be too ſtrong for me, then thou ſhalt help me; but if the children of* Ammon *be too ſtrong for thee, then will I come and help thee*. It is an happy thing, when the captains of God's people join together as brethren, and lend their hand to the aid of each other againſt the common adverſary. Concord in defence, or aſſault, is the way to victory; as, contrarily, the diviſion of the leaders is the overthrow of the army.

Set aſide ſome particular actions, *Joab* was a worthy captain, both for wiſdom and valour. Who could either exhort or reſolve better than he? *Be of good courage, and let us play the men, for our people, and for the cities of our God; and the Lord do that which ſeemeth him good!* It is not either private glory or profit that whets his fortitude, but the reſpect to the cauſe of God and his people. That ſoldier can never anſwer it to God, that ſtrikes not more as a juſticiar, than as an enemy; neither doth he content himſelf

himſelf with his own courage, but he animates others. The tongue of a commander fights more than his hand. It is enough for private men to exerciſe what life and limbs they have: a good leader muſt, out of his own abundancce, put life and ſpirits into all others; if a lion lead ſheep into the field, there is hope of victory. Laſtly, when he hath done his beſt, he reſolves to depend upon God for the iſſue, not truſting to his ſword, or his bow, but to the providence of the Almighty, for ſucceſs, as a man religiouſly awful, and awfully confident, while there ſhould be no want in their own endeavours. He knew well that the race was not to the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong, therefore he looks up above the hills, whence cometh his ſalvation. All valour is cowardice to that which is built upon religion.

I marvel not to ſee *Joab* victorious, while he is thus godly. The *Syrians* fly before him like flocks of ſheep, the *Ammonites* follow them: the two ſons of *Zeruiah* have nothing to do but to purſue and execute. The throats of the *Ammonites* are cut, for cutting the beards and coats of the *Iſraelitiſh* meſſengers: neither doth this revenge end in the field, *Rabbah*, the royal city of *Ammon*, is ſtrongly beleagured by *Joab*: the *City of Waters* (after well-near a year's ſiege) yieldeth, the reſt can no longer hold out. Now *Joab*, as one that deſireth more to approve himſelf a loyal and a careful ſubject, than a happy general, ſends to his maſter *David*, that he ſhould come perſonally, and encamp againſt the city, and take it; *Leſt*, (ſaith he,) *I take it, and it be called after my name.* O noble and admirable fidelity of a dutiful ſervant, that prefers his lord to himſelf, and is ſo far from ſtealing honour from his maſter's deſerts, that he willingly remits of his own to add unto his! The war was not his, he was only employed by his ſovereign: the ſame perſon, that was wronged in the ambaſſadors, reven-

geth

eth by his ſoldiers. The praiſe of the act ſhall, like fountain water, return to the ſea, whence it originally came. To ſeek a man's own glory, is not glory. Alas, how many are there, who, being ſent to ſue for God, woo for themſelves! O God, it is a fearful thing to rob thee of that which is deareſt to thee, glory; which, as thou wilt not give to any creature, ſo much leſs wilt thou endure that any creature ſhould filch it from thee, and give it to himſelf! Have thou the honour of all our actions, who giveſt a being to our actions and us, and in both haſt moſt juſtly regarded thine own praiſe.

CONTEM. IV. DAVID *with* BATHSHEBA *and* URIAH.

WITH what unwillingneſs, with what fear, do I ſtill look upon the miſcarriage of the man after God's own heart! O holy prophet, who can promiſe himſelf always to ſtand, when he ſees thee fallen, and maimed with the fall! Who can aſſure himſelf of an immunity from the fouleſt ſins, when he ſees thee offending ſo heinouſly, ſo bloodily? Let profane eyes behold thee contentedly, as a pattern, as an excuſe of ſinning; I ſhall never look upon thee but thro' tears, as a woful ſpectacle of human infirmity.

While *Joab* and all *Iſrael* were buſy in the war againſt *Ammon*, in the ſiege of *Rabbah*, Satan finds time to lay ſiege to the ſecure heart of *David*. Whoever found *David* thus tempted, thus foiled in the days of his buſy wars? Now only do I ſee the king of *Iſrael* riſing from his bed in the evening: the time was, when he roſe up in the morning to his early devotions, when he brake his nightly reſt with public cares, with the buſineſs of the ſtate; all that while he was innocent, he was holy: but now that he wallows in the bed of idleneſs, he is fit to invite temptation.

The

The induſtrious man hath no leiſure to ſin. The idle hath neither leiſure nor power to avoid ſin. Exerciſe is not more wholeſome for the body than for the ſoul, the remiſſion whereof, breeds matter of diſeaſe in both. The water that hath been heated ſooneſt freezeth. The moſt active ſpirit ſooneſt tireth with ſlackening. The earth ſtands ſtill, and is all dregs: the heavens ever move, and are pure. We have no reaſon to complain of the aſſiduity of work; the toil of action is anſwered by the benefit; if we did leſs, we ſhould ſuffer more. Satan, like an idle companion, if he finds us buſy, flies back, and ſees it no time to entertain vain purpoſes with us: we cannot pleaſe him better, than by caſting away our work, to hold chat with him; we cannot yield ſo far, and be guiltleſs.

Even *David*'s eyes have no ſooner the ſleep rubbed out of them, than they rove to wanton proſpects: he walks upon his roof, and ſees *Bathſheba* waſhing herſelf, inquires after her, ſends for her, ſolicits her to uncleanneſs. The ſame ſpirit, that ſhut up his eyes in an unſeaſonable ſleep, opens them upon an enticeing object; while ſin hath ſuch a ſolicitor, it cannot want either means or opportunity. I cannot think *Bathſheba* could be ſo immodeſt, as to waſh herſelf openly, eſpecially from her natural uncleanneſs. Luſt is quick-ſighted. *David* hath eſpied her, where ſhe could eſpy no boholder. His eyes recoil upon his heart, and have ſmitten him with ſinful deſire.

There can be no ſafety to that ſoul, where the ſenſes are let looſe. He can never keep his covenant with God, that makes not a covenant with his eyes. It is an idle preſumption to think the outward man may be free, while the inward is ſafe. He is more than a man whoſe heart is not led by his eyes; he is no regenerate man, whoſe eyes are not reſtrained by his heart.

O *Bath-*

O *Bathſheba*, how wert thou waſhed from thine uncleanneſs, when thou yieldeſt to go into an adulterous bed! never wert thou ſo foul, as now when thou wert new waſhed. The worſt of nature is cleanlineſs to the beſt of ſin. Thou hadſt been clean, if thou hadſt not waſhed; yet for thee, I know how to plead infirmity of ſex, and the importunity of a king: but what ſhall I ſay for thee, O thou royal prophet, and prophetical king of *Iſrael?* Where ſhall I find ought to extenuate that crime, for which God himſelf hath noted thee? Did not thine holy profeſſion teach thee to abhor ſuch a ſin more than death? Was not thy juſtice wont to puniſh this ſin with no leſs than death? Did not thy very calling call thee to a protection and preſervation of juſtice, of chaſtity in thy ſubjects? Didſt thou want ſtore of wives of thine own? Wert thou reſtrained from taking more? Was there no beauty in *Iſrael*, but in a ſubject's marriage bed? Wert thou overcome by the vehement ſolicitations of an adultereſs? Wert thou not the tempter, the proſecutor of this uncleanneſs? I ſhould accuſe thee deeply, if thou hadſt not accuſed thyſelf; nothing wanted to greaten thy ſin, or our wonder and fear. O God, whither do we go, if thou ſtay us not? Whoever amongſt the millions of thy ſervants could find himſelf furniſhed with ſtronger preſervatives againſt ſin? Againſt whom could ſuch a ſin find leſs pretence of prevailing? O keep thou us, that preſumptuous ſins prevail not over us; ſo only ſhall we be free from great offences.

The ſuits of kings are imperative: ambition did now prove a bawd to luſt. *Bathſheba* yielded to offend God, to diſhonour her huſband, to clog and wound her own ſoul, to abuſe her body. Diſhoneſty grows bold, when it is countenanced with greatneſs. Eminent perſons had need be careful of their demands; they ſin by authority, that are ſolicited by the mighty.

Had

Had *Bathſheba* been mindful of her matrimonial fidelity, perhaps *David* had been ſoon checked in his inordinate deſire; her facility furthers the ſin. The firſt motioner of evil is moſt faulty; but as in quarrels, ſo in offences, the ſecond blow (which is the conſent) makes the fray. Good *Joſeph* was moved to folly by his great and beautiful miſtreſs; this fire fell upon wet tinder, and therefore ſoon went out.

Sin is not acted alone; if but one party be wiſe, both eſcape. It is no excuſe to ſay, I was tempted, though by the great, though by the holy and learned: almoſt all ſinners are miſled by that transformed angel of light. The action is that we muſt regard, not the perſon. Let the mover be never ſo glorious, if he ſtir us to evil, he muſt be entertained with defiance.

The God, that knows how to raiſe good out of evil, bleſſes an adulterous copulation with that increaſe, which he denies to the chaſte embracements of honeſt wedlock. *Bathſheba* hath conceived by *David;* and now at once conceives a ſorrow and care how to ſmother the ſhame of her conception: he, that did the fact, muſt hide it.

O *David,* where is thy repentance! where is thy tenderneſs and compunction of heart! where are thoſe holy meditations, which had wont to take up thy ſoul! Alas, inſtead of clearing thy ſin, thou laboureſt to cloak it, and ſpendeſt thoſe thoughts in the concealing of thy wickedneſs, which thou ſhouldſt rather have beſtowed in preventing it. The beſt of God's children may not only be drenched in the waves of ſin, but ly in them for the time, and perhaps ſink twice to the bottom: what hypocrite could have done worſe, than ſtudy how to cover the face of his ſin from the eyes of men, while he regarded not the ſting of his ſin in his ſoul?

As there are ſome acts wherein the hypocrite is a ſaint, ſo there are ſome wherein the greateſt ſaint upon earth may be an hypocrite. *Saul* did thus go about to colour his ſin, and is curſed. The veſſels of mercy and wrath are not ever diſtinguiſhable by their actions: he makes the difference, that will have mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth.

It is rare and hard to commit a ſingle ſin. *David* hath abuſed the wife of *Uriah*, now he would abuſe his perſon, in cauſing him to father a falſe ſeed. That worthy *Hittite* is ſent for from the wars; and now, after ſome cunning and far-fetched queſtions, is diſmiſſed to his houſe, not without a preſent of favour. *David* could not but imagine, that the beauty of his *Bathſheba* muſt needs be attractive enough to an huſband, whom long abſence in wars had with-held all that while from ſo pleaſing a bed; neither could he think, that ſince that face, and thoſe breaſts had power to allure himſelf to an unlawful luſt, it could be poſſible, that *Uriah* ſhould not be invited by them to an allowed and warrantable fruition.

That *David*'s heart might now the rather ſtrike him, in comparing the chaſte reſolutions of his ſervant with his own light incontinence, good *Uriah* ſleeps at the door of the king's palace, making choice of a ſtony pillow, under the canopy of heaven, rather than the delicate bed of her whom he thought as honeſt as he knew fair. *The ark* (ſaith he) *and* Iſrael, *and* Judah, *dwell in tents, and my lord* Joab, *and the ſervants of my lord abide in the open fields; ſhall I then go into my houſe to eat and drink, and ly with my wife? by thy life, and by the life of thy ſoul, I will not do this thing.*

Who can but be aſtoniſhed at this change, to ſee a ſoldier auſtere, and a prophet wanton! And how doth that ſoldier's auſterity ſhame the prophet's wantonneſs!

tonneſs! O zealous and mortified ſoul, worthy of a more faithful wife, of a more juſt maſter, how didſt thou over-look all baſe ſenſuality, and hatedſt to be happy alone! War and luſt had wont to be reputed friends; thy breaſt is not more full of courage than chaſtity, and is ſo far from wandering after forbidden pleaſures, that it refuſeth lawful.

There is a time to laugh, and a time to mourn; a time to embrace, and a time to be far from embracing. Even the beſt actions are not always ſeaſonable, much leſs the indifferent. He, that ever takes liberty to do what he may, ſhall offend no leſs, than he that ſometimes takes liberty to do what he may not.

If any thing, the ark of God is fitteſt to lead our tunes; according as that is either diſtreſſed, or proſpereth, ſhould we frame our mirth or mourning. To dwell in ceiled houſes, while the temple lies waſte, is the ground of God's juſt quarrel.

How ſhall we ſing a ſong of the Lord in a ſtrange land? If I forget thee, O Jeruſalem, *let my right-hand forget her cunning; if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; yea, if I prefer not* Jeruſalem *to my chief joy.*

As every man is a limb of the community, ſo muſt he be affected with the eſtate of the univerſal body, whether healthful or languiſhing; it did not more aggravate *David*'s ſin, that while the ark and *Iſrael* was in hazard and diſtreſs, he could find time to looſe the reins to wanton deſires and actions, than it magnifies the religious zeal of *Uriah*, that he abandons comfort, till he ſee the ark and *Iſrael* victorious.

Common dangers or calamities muſt (like the rapt motion) carry our hearts contrary to the ways of our private occaſions. He, that cannot be moved with words, ſhall be tried with wine. *Uriah* had equally proteſted againſt feaſting at home, and ſociety with

his wife: to the one, the authority of a king forceth him abroad, in hope that the exceſs thereof ſhall force him to the other. It is like, that holy captain intended only to yield ſo much obedience, as might conſiſt with his courſe of auſterity. But wine is a mocker; when it goes plauſibly in, no man can imagine how it will rage and tyrannize: he, that receives that traitor within his gates, ſhall too late complain of ſurpriſal. Like unto that ill ſpirit, it inſinuates ſweetly, but in the end it bites like a ſerpent, and hurts like a cockatrice. Even good *Uriah* is made drunk; the holieſt ſoul may be overtaken: it is hard gainſaying, where a king begins an health to a ſubject; where, O where will this wickedneſs end! *David* will now procure the ſin of another to hide his own. *Uriah*'s drunkenneſs is more *David*'s offence than his. It is weakly yielded to of the one, which was wilfully intended of the other. The one was as the ſinner, the other as the tempter.

Had not *David* known that wine was an inducement to luſt, he had ſpared thoſe ſuperfluous cups. Experience had taught him, that the eye, debauched with wine, will look upon ſtrange women. The drunkard may be any thing ſave good. Yet in this the aim failed; grace is ſtronger than wine; while that with-holds, in vain ſhall the fury of the grape attempt to carry *Uriah* to his own bed. Sober *David* is now worſe than drunken *Uriah*. Had not the king of *Iſrael* been more intoxicate with ſin than *Uriah* with drink, he had not, in a ſober intemperance, climbed up into that bed, which the drunken temperance of *Uriah* refuſed.

If *David* had been but himſelf, how had he loved, how had he honoured this honeſt and religious zeal, in his ſo faithful ſervant, whom now he cruelly ſeeks to reward with death! That fact, which wine cannot hide, the ſword ſhall. *Uriah* ſhall bear his own mittimus

timus unto *Joab*: *Put ye* Uriah *in the forefront of the ſtrength of the battle, and retire back from him, that he may be ſmitten and die.* What is become of thee, O thou good Spirit, that hadſt wont to guide thy choſen ſervant in his former ways! Is not this the man, whom we lately ſaw ſo heart-ſmitten, for but cutting off the lap of the garment of a wicked maſter, that is now thus laviſh of the blood of a gracious and well-deſerving ſervant! Could it be likely, that ſo worthy a captain could fall alone? Could *David* have expiated this ſin with his own blood, it had been but well ſpent; but to cover his ſin with the innocent blood of others, was a crime above aſtoniſhment.

O the deep deceitfulneſs of ſin! If the devil ſhould have come to *David*, in the moſt lovely form of *Bathſheba* herſelf, and at the firſt ſhould have directly, and in plain terms, ſolicited him to murder his beſt ſervant, I doubt not but he would have ſpit ſcorn in that face, on which he ſhould otherways have doted; now, by many cunning windings, Satan riſes up to that temptation, and prevails; that ſhall be done for a colour of guiltineſs, whereof the ſoul would have hated to be immediately guilty: even thoſe, that find a juſt horror, in leaping down from ſome high tower, yet may be perſuaded to deſcend by ſtairs to the bottom. He knows not where he ſhall ſtay, that hath willingly ſlipt into a known wickedneſs.

How many doth an eminent offender draw with him into evil! It could not be, but that diverſe of the attendants, both of *David* and *Bathſheba*, muſt be conſcious to that adultery: great mens ſins are ſeldom ſecret; and now *Joab* muſt be fetcht in, as acceſſory to the murder. How muſt this example needs harden *Joab* againſt the conſcience of *Abner*'s blood! while he cannot but think, *David* cannot avenge that in me, which he acteth himſelf.

Honour

Honour is pretended to poor *Uriah*, death is meant. This man was one of the worthies of *David*; their courage ſought glory in the difficulteſt exploits. That reputation had never been purchaſed without attempts of equal danger. Had not the leader and followers of *Uriah* been more treacherous than his enemies were ſtrong, he had come off with victory. Now, he was not the firſt or laſt that periſhed by his friends. *David* hath forgotten, that himſelf was in like ſort betrayed in his maſter's intention, upon the dowry of the *Philiſtines* foreſkins. I fear to aſk, who ever noted ſo foul a plot in *David*'s rejected predeceſſor? *Uriah* muſt be the meſſenger of his own death, *Joab* muſt be a traitor to his friend, the hoſt of God muſt ſhamefully turn their backs upon the *Ammonites*, all that *Iſraelitiſh* blood muſt be ſhed, that murder muſt be ſeconded with diſſimulation; and all this to hide one adultery. O God, thou hadſt never ſuffered ſo dear a favourite of thine to fall ſo fearfully, if thou hadſt not meant to make him an univerſal example to mankind, of not preſuming, of not deſpairing. How can we preſume of not ſinning, or deſpair for ſinning, when we find ſo great a ſaint thus fallen, thus riſen!

CONTEM. V. NATHAN *and* DAVID.

YET *Bathſheba* mourned for the death of that husband, whom ſhe had been drawn to diſhonour. How could ſhe beſtow tears enough upon that funeral, whereof her ſin was the cauſe! If ſhe had but a ſuſpicion of the plot of his death, the fountains of her eyes could not yield water enough to waſh off her husband's blood; her ſin was more worthy of ſorrow than her loſs. If this grief had been right placed, the hope of hiding her ſhame, and the ambition to be a queen, had not ſo ſoon mitigated it; neither

ther had ſhe, upon any terms, been drawn into the bed of her husband's murderer. Every gleam of earthly comfort can dry up the tears of worldly ſorrow. *Bathſheba* hath ſoon loſt her grief at the court; the remembrance of an husband is buried in the jollity and ſtate of a princeſs. *David* ſecurely enjoys his ill-purchaſed love, and is content to exchange the conſcience of his ſin, for the ſenſe of his pleaſure. But the juſt and holy God will not put it up ſo; he that hates ſin ſo much the more, as the offender is more dear to him, will let *David* feel the bruiſe of his fall. If God's beſt children have been ſometimes ſuffered to ſleep in a ſin, at laſt he hath awakened them in a fright.

David was a prophet of God, yet he hath not only ſtept into theſe foul ſins, but ſojourns in them. If any profeſſion or ſtate of life could have privileged from ſin, the angels had not ſinned in heaven, nor man in paradiſe. *Nathan* the prophet is ſent to the prophet *David*, for reproof, for conviction; had it been any other man's caſe, none could have been more quick-ſighted than the princely prophet; in his own he is ſo blind, that God is fain to lend him others eyes. Even the phyſician himſelf, when he is ſick, ſends for the counſel of thoſe whom his health did mutually aid with advice. Let no man think himſelf too good to learn; teachers themſelves may be taught that, in their own particular, which, in a generality, they have often taught others: it is not only ignorance that is to be removed, but miſaffection.

Who can preſcribe a juſt period to the beſt man's repentance? About ten months are paſſed ſince *David*'s ſin; in all which time I find no news of any ſerious compunction; it could not be but ſome glances of remorſe muſt needs have paſſed through his ſoul long ere this; but a due and ſolemn contrition was not heard of till *Nathan*'s meſſage, and, perhaps, had been

been further adjourned, if that monitor had been longer deferred. Alas, what long and dead ſleeps may the holieſt ſoul take in fearful ſins! Were it not for thy mercy, O God, the beſt of us ſhould end our ſpiritual lethargy in ſleep of death.

It might have pleaſed God as eaſily to have ſent *Nathan* to check *David* in his firſt purpoſe of ſinning; ſo had his eyes been reſtrained, *Bathſheba* honeſt, *Uriah* alive with honour: now the wiſdom of the Almighty knew how to win more glory by the permiſſion of ſo foul an evil, than by the prevention; yea, he knew how, by the permiſſion of one ſin, to prevent millions. How many thouſands had ſinned, in a vain preſumption on their own ſtrength, if *David* had not thus offended? how many thouſands had deſpaired, in the conſcience of their own weakneſſes, if theſe horrible ſins had not received forgiveneſs? It is happy for all times, that we have ſo holy a ſinner, ſo ſinful a penitent: it matters not how bitter the pill is, but how well wrapped; ſo cunningly hath *Nathan* conveyed this doze, that it begins to work ere it be taſted. There is no one thing wherein is more uſe of wiſdom, than the due contriving of a reprehenſion, which, in a diſcreet delivery, helps the diſeaſe; in an unwiſe, deſtroys nature.

Had not *Nathan* been uſed to the poſſeſſion of *David*'s ear, this complaint had been ſuſpected. It well beſeems a king to take information by a prophet. While wiſe *Nathan* was querulouſly diſcourſing of the cruel rich man, that had forcibly taken away the only lamb of his poor neighbour, how willingly doth *David* liſten to the ſtory, and how ſharply, even above law, doth he cenſure the fact? *As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing ſhall ſurely die.* Full little did he think that he had pronounced ſentence againſt himſelf; it had not been ſo heavy, if he had known on whom it ſhould have lighted. We have

have open ears and quick tongues to the vices of others; how ſevere juſticers we can be to our very own crimes in others! how flattering paraſites to another's crime in ourſelves! The life of doctrine is in application. *Nathan* might have been long enough in his narration, in his invective, ere *David* would have been touched with his own guiltineſs; but now, that the prophet brings the word home to his boſom, he cannot but be affected. We may take pleaſure to hear men ſpeak in the clouds, we never take profit till we find a propriety in the exhortation or reproof. There was not more cunning in the parable, than courage in the application; *Thou art the man.* If *David* be a king, he may not look not to hear of his faults; God's meſſages may be no other than impartial. It is a treacherous flattery, in divine errands, to regard greatneſs. If prophets muſt be mannerly in the form, yet in the matter of reproof reſolute: the words are not their own; they are but the heralds of the king of heaven, *Thus ſaith the Lord God of* Iſrael.

How thunder-ſtricken do we think *David* did now ſtand! how did the change of his colour bewray the confuſion in his ſoul, while his conſcience ſaid the ſame within, which the prophet ſounded in his ear! And now, leaſt ought ſhould be wanting to his humiliation, all God's former favours ſhall be laid before his eyes, by way of exprobration. He is worthy to be upbraided with mercies, that hath abuſed mercies unto wantonneſs. While we do well, God gives and ſays nothing; when we do ill, he lays his benefits in our diſh, and caſts them in our teeth, that our ſhame may be ſo much the more, by how much our obligations have been greater. The bleſſings of God, in our unworthy carriage, prove but the aggravations of ſin, and additions to judgment.

I ſee all God's children falling into ſin, ſome of them lying in ſin, none of them maintaining their ſin: *David* cannot have the heart, or the face, to ſtand out againſt the meſſage of God; but now, as a man confounded and condemned in himſelf, he cries out, in the bitterneſs of a wounded ſoul, *I have ſinned againſt the Lord.* It was but a ſhort word, but paſſionate; and ſuch as came from the bottom of a contrite heart. The greateſt griefs are not moſt verbal. *Saul* confeſſed his ſin more largely, leſs effectually. God cares not for phraſes, but for affections. The firſt piece of our amends to God for ſinning is the acknowledgment of ſin; he can do little, that, in a juſt offence, cannot accuſe himſelf. If we cannot be ſo good as we would, it is reaſon we ſhould do God ſo much right, as to ſay how evil we are. And why was not this done ſooner? it is ſtrange to ſee how eaſily ſin gets into the heart, how hardly it gets out of the mouth; is it, becauſe ſin, like unto Satan, where it hath got poſſeſſion, is deſirous to hold it, and knows that it is fully ejected by a free confeſſion? or becauſe, in a guiltineſs of deformity, it hides itſelf in the breaſt where it is once entertained, and hates the light? or, becauſe the tongue is ſo fee'd with ſelf-love, that it is loath to be drawn unto any verdict againſt the heart or hands? or is it out of an idle miſpriſion of ſhame, which, while it ſhould be placed in offending, is miſplaced in diſcloſing of our offence.

However, ſure I am, that God hath need even of racks to draw out confeſſions, and ſcarce in death itſelf are we wrought to a diſcovery of our errors.

There is no one thing wherein our folly ſhews itſelf more than in theſe hurtful concealments. Contrary to the proceedings of human juſtice, it is with God, *Confeſs and live;* no ſooner can *David* ſay, *I have ſinned*, than *Nathan* infers, *The Lord alſo hath put away thy ſin. He that hides his ſins,*

ſhall

ſhall not proſper; but he that confeſſeth and forſaketh them ſhall find mercy. Who would not accuſe himſelf, to be acquitted of God? O God, who would not tell his wickedneſs to thee, that knoweſt it better than his own heart, that his heart may be eaſed of that wickedneſs, which, being not told, killeth! Since we have ſinned, why ſhould we be niggardly of that action, wherein we may at once give glory to thee, and relief to our ſouls?

David had ſworn, in a zeal of juſtice, that the rich oppreſſor, for but taking his poor neighbour's lamb, ſhould die the death; God, by *Nathan*, is more favourable to *David*, than to take him at his word, *Thou ſhalt not die.* O the marvellous power of repentance. Beſides adultery, *David* had ſhed the blood of innocent *Uriah*. The ſtrict law was, *Eye for eye, tooth for tooth. He that ſmiteth with the ſword, ſhall periſh with the ſword:* yet, as if a penitent confeſſion had diſpenſed with the rigour of juſtice, now God ſays, *Thou ſhalt not die. David* was the voice of the law, awarding death unto ſin; *Nathan* was the voice of the goſpel, awarding life unto the repentance for ſin. Whatſoever the ſore be, never any ſoul applied this remedy and died, never any ſoul eſcaped death that applied it not.

David himſelf ſhall not die for this fact; but his miſ-begotten child ſhall die for him. He that ſaid, *The Lord hath put away thy ſin*, yet ſaid alſo, *The ſword ſhall not depart from thine houſe.*

The ſame mouth, with one breath, pronounces the ſentence both of abſolution and death; abſolution to the perſon, death to the iſſue. Pardon may well ſtand with temporal afflictions. Where God hath forgiven, though he doth not puniſh, yet he may chaſtiſe, and that unto blood; neither doth he always forbear correction, where he remits revenge. So long as

he ſmites us not as an angry Judge, we may endure to ſmart from him as a loving father.

Yet even this rod did *David* deprecate with tears: how fain would he ſhake off ſo eaſy a load! The child is ſtricken; the father faſts, and prays, and weeps, and lies all night upon the earth, and abhors the noiſe of comfort; that child, which was the fruit and monument of his odious adultery, whom he could never have looked upon without recognition of his ſin, in whoſe face he could not but have ſtill read the records of his own ſhame, is thus mourned for, thus ſued for: it is eaſy to obſerve that good man over-paſſionately affected to his children. Who would not have thought, that *David* might have held himſelf well appaid, that his ſoul eſcaped an eternal death, his body a violent; though God ſhould puniſh his ſin in that child, in whom he ſinned: yet even againſt this croſs he bends his prayers, as if nothing had been forgiven him. There is no child that would be ſcourged, if he might eſcape for crying; no affliction is for the time other than grievous; neither is therefore yielded unto, without ſome kind of reluctation. Far yet was it from the heart of *David* to make any oppoſition to the will of God; he ſued, he ſtruggled not; there is no impatience in entreaties; he well knew that the threats of temporal evils ran commonly with a ſecret condition, and therefore might perhaps be avoided by humble importunity: if any means under heaven can avert judgments, it is our prayers.

God could not chuſe, but like well the boldneſs of *David*'s faith, who, after the apprehenſion of ſo heavy a diſpleaſure, is ſo far from doubting of the forgiveneſs of his ſin, that he dares become a ſuitor unto God for his ſick child. Sin doth not make us more ſtrange, than faith confident.

But

But it is not in the power of the ſtrongeſt faith to preſerve us from all afflictions; after all *David*'s prayers and tears, the child muſt die. The careful ſervants dare but whiſper this ſad news: they who had found their maſter ſo averſe from the motion of comfort in the ſickneſs of the child, feared him uncapable of comfort in his death.

Suſpicion is quick-witted. Every occaſion makes us miſdoubt that event which we fear. This ſecrecy proclaims that which they were ſo loath to utter. *David* perceives his child dead, and now he riſes up from the earth whereon he lay, and waſhes himſelf, and changeth his apparel, and goes firſt into God's houſe to worſhip, and into his own to eat; now he refuſes no comfort, who before would take none. The iſſue of things doth more fully ſhew the will of God than the prediction: God never did any thing but what he would; he hath ſometimes foretold that for trial, which his ſecret will intended not; he would foretel it, he would not effect it; becauſe he would therefore foretel it, that he might not effect it. His predictions of outward evils are not always abſolute, his actions are. *David* well ſees, by the event, what the decree of God was concerning his child, which now he could not ſtrive againſt without a vain impatience. Till we know the determinations of the Almighty, it is free for us to ſtrive in our prayers, to ſtrive with him, not againſt him; when once we know them, it is our duty to ſit down in a ſilent contentation.

While the child was yet alive, I faſted and wept; for I ſaid, who can tell whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live; but now he is dead, wherefore ſhould I faſt? can I bring him back again?

The grief, that goes before an evil for remedy, can hardly be too much, but that which follows an evil paſt

paſt remedy, cannot be too little. Even in the ſaddeſt accident, death, we may yield ſomething to nature, nothing to impatience: immoderation of ſorrow, for loſſes paſt hope of recovery, is more ſullen than uſeful; our ſtomach may be bewrayed by it, not our wiſdom.

CONTEM. VI. AMNON *and* TAMAR.

IT is not poſſible that any word of God ſhould fall to the ground. *David* is not more ſure of forgiveneſs than ſmart. Three main ſins paſſed him in this buſineſs of *Uriah*, adultery, murder, diſſimulation: for all which he receives preſent payment; for adultery, in the deflowering of his daughter *Tamar*; for murder, in the killing of his ſon *Amnon*; for diſſimulation in the contriving of both; yet all this was but the beginning of evils. Where the father of the family brings ſin home to the houſe, it is not eaſily ſwept out. Unlawful luſt propagates itſelf by example. How juſtly is *David* ſcourged by the ſin of his ſons, whom his act taught to offend?

Maacha was the daughter of an heatheniſh king: by her had *David* that beautiful, but unhappy iſſue, *Abſalom*, and his no leſs fair ſiſter *Tamar*. Perhaps, thus late doth *David* feel the puniſhment of that unfit choice. I ſhould have marvelled, if ſo holy a man had not found croſſes in ſo unequal a match, either in his perſon, or at leaſt in his ſeed.

Beauty, if it be not well diſciplined, proves not a friend, but a traitor; three of *David*'s children are undone by it at once. What elſe was guilty of *Amnon*'s inceſtuous love, *Tamar*'s raviſhment, *Abſalom*'s pride? It is a bleſſing to the fair, yet ſuch a bleſſing, as, if the ſoul anſwer not to the face, may lead to a curſe. How commonly have we ſeen the fouleſt ſoul dwell faireſt. It was no fault of *Tamar*'s that ſhe was beautiful; the

candle

candle offends not in burning, the fooliſh fly offends in ſcorching itſelf in the flame; yet it is no ſmall miſery to become a temptation unto another; and to be made but the occaſion of others ruin. *Amnon* is love-ſick of his ſiſter *Tamar*, and languiſhes of that unnatural heat. Whither will not wanton luſt carry the inordinate minds of pampered and ungoverned youths? None but this half ſiſter will pleaſe the eyes of the young prince of *Iſrael*. Ordinary pleaſures will not content thoſe whom the conceit of greatneſs, youth and eaſe, have let looſe to their appetite.

Perhaps yet this unkindly flame might in time have gone out alone, had not there been a *Jonadab* to blow theſe coals with ill counſel. It were ſtrange, if great princes ſhould want ſome paraſitical followers, that are ready to feed their ill humours. *Why art thou, the king's ſon, ſo lean from day to day?* As if it were unworthy the heir of a king to ſuffer either law or conſcience to ſtand in the way of his deſires: whereas wiſe princes know well, that their places give them no privilege of ſinning, but call them in rather to ſo much more ſtrictneſs, as their example may be more prejudicial.

Jonadab was the couſin-german of *Amnon*. Ill advice is ſo much more dangerous, as the intereſt of the giver is more. Had he been a true friend, he had bent all the forces of his diſſuaſion againſt the wicked motions of that ſinful luſt; and had ſhewed the prince of *Iſrael* how much thoſe lewd deſires provoked God, and blemiſhed himſelf, and had lent his hand to ſtrangle them in their firſt conception. There cannot be a more worthy improvement of friendſhip, than in a fervent oppoſition to the ſins of them whom we profeſs to love. No enemy can be ſo mortal to great princes, as thoſe officious clients, whoſe flattery ſoothes them up in wickedneſs; theſe are traitors to the ſoul, and, by a pleaſing violence, kill the beſt part eternally.

How

How ready at hand is an evil ſuggeſtion! Good counſel is like unto well-water, that muſt be drawn up with a pump or bucket. Ill counſel is like to conduit-water, which, if the cock be but turned, runs out alone. *Jonadab* hath ſoon projected how *Amnon* ſhall accompliſh his lawleſs purpoſe. The way muſt be to feign himſelf ſick in body, whoſe mind was ſick of luſt; and, under this pretence, to procure the preſence of her who had wounded, and only might cure him.

The daily increaſing languor and leanneſs, and paleneſs of love-ſick *Amnon*, might well give colour to a kerchief, and a pallet. Now is it ſoon told *David*, that his eldeſt ſon is caſt upon his ſick-bed; there needs no ſuit for his viſitation. The careful father haſtens to his bed-ſide, not without doubts and fears. He that was lately ſo afflicted with the ſickneſs of a child that ſcarce lived to ſee the light, how ſenſible muſt we needs think he would be of the indiſpoſition of his firſt-born ſon, in the prime of his age and hopes? It is not given to any prophet to foreſee all things. Happy had it been for *David*, if *Amnon* had been truly ſick, and ſick unto death; yet who could have perſuaded this paſſionate father to have been content with this ſucceſſion of loſſes, this early loſs of his ſucceſſor. How glad is he to hear, that his daughter *Tamar*'s ſkill might be likely to fit the diet of ſo dear a patient. Conceit is wont to rule much, both in ſickneſs and in the cure. *Tamar* is ſent by her father to the houſe of *Amnon*; her hand only muſt dreſs that diſh which may pleaſe the nice palate of her ſick brother. Even the children of kings, in thoſe homelier times, did not ſcorn to put their fingers to ſome works of houſewifery. *She took flower and did knead it, and did make cakes in his ſight, and did bake the cakes, and took a pan, and poured them out before him.* Had ſhe not been ſometimes uſed to ſuch domeſtic employments,

employments, ſhe had been now to ſeek; neither had this been required of her, but upon the knowledge of her ſkill. She doth not plead the impairing of her beauty by the ſcorching of the fire, nor thinks her hand too dainty for ſuch mean ſervices, but ſettles to the work, as one that had rather regard the neceſſities of her brother, than her own ſtate. Only pride and idleneſs have baniſhed honeſt and thrifty diligence out of the houſes of the great.

This was not yet the diſh that *Amnon* longed for. It was the cook, and not the cakes, which that wanton eye affected. Unlawful acts ſeek for ſecrecy; the company is diſmiſſed, *Tamar* only ſtays. Good meaning ſuſpects nothing; while ſhe preſents the meat ſhe had prepared to her ſick brother, herſelf is made a prey to his outrageous luſt. The modeſt virgin intreats and perſuades in vain: ſhe lays before him the ſin, the ſhame, the danger of the fact; and, ſince none of theſe can prevail, fain would win time by the ſuggeſting of impoſſible hopes. Nothing but violence can ſtay a reſolved ſinner; what he cannot by intreaty, he will have by force. If the devil were not more ſtrong in men than nature, they would never ſeek pleaſure in violence. *Amnon* had no ſooner fulfilled his beaſtly deſires, than he hates *Tamar* more than he loved her. Inordinate luſt never ends but in diſcontentment: loſs of ſpirits, and remorſe of ſoul, make the remembrance of that act tedious, whoſe expectation promiſed delight. If we could ſee the back of ſinful pleaſures, ere we behold their face, our hearts could not but be foreſtalled with a juſt deteſtation. Brutiſh *Amnon*, it was thyſelf whom thou ſhouldſt have hated for this villany, not thine innocent ſiſter! Both of you lay together, only one committed inceſt. What was ſhe but a patient in that impotent fury of luſt? How unjuſtly do carnal men miſplace their affections? No man can ſay, whether that love or this

hatred were more unreaſonable. Fraud drew *Tamar* into the houſe of *Amnon*, force entertained her within, and droye her out. Fain would ſhe have hid her ſhame where it was wrought, and may not be allowed it. That roof, under which ſhe came with honour, and in obedience and love, may not be lent her, for the time, as a ſhelter of her ignominy. Never any ſavage could be more barbarous. *Shechem* had raviſhed *Dinah*, his offence did not make her odious; his affection ſo continued, that he is willing rather to draw blood of himſelf and his people, than forego her whom he had abuſed; *Amnon*, in one hour, is in the exceſs of love and hate, and is ſick of her for whom he was ſick. She, that lately kept the keys of his heart, is now locked out of his doors. Unruly paſſions run ever into extremities, and are then beſt appaid, when they are furtheſt off from reaſon and moderation.

What could *Amnon* think would be the event of ſo foul a fact, which as he had not the grace to prevent, ſo he hath not the care to conceal? If he looked not ſo high as heaven, what could he imagine would follow hereupon, but the diſpleaſure of a father, the danger of law, the indignation of a brother, the ſhame and outcries of the world; all which he might have hoped to avoid by ſecrecy and plauſible courſes of ſatisfaction. It is the juſt judgment of God upon preſumptuous offenders, that they loſe their wit, together with their honeſty; and are either ſo blinded, that they cannot foreſee the iſſue of their actions, or ſo beſotted, that they do not regard it.

Poor *Tamar* can but bewail that which ſhe could not keep, her virginity, not loſt, but torn from her, by a cruel violence. She rends her princely robe, and laid aſhes on her head, and laments the ſhame of another's ſin, and lives more deſolate than a widow, in the houſe of her brother *Abſalom*.

In

In the mean time, what a corroſive muſt this news needs be to the heart of good *David*, whoſe fatherly command had, out of love, caſt his daughter into the jaws of this lion? What an inſolent affront muſt he needs conſtrue this to be offered by a ſon to a father, that the father ſhould be made the pander of his own daughter to his ſon! He that lay upon the ground weeping for but the ſickneſs of an infant, how vexed do we think he was with the villany of his heir, with the raviſhment of his daughter, both of them worſe than many deaths! What revenge can he think of for ſo heinous a crime leſs than death; and what leſs than death is it to him, to think of a revenge? Rape was, by the law of God, capital, how much more when it is ſeconded with inceſt? Anger was not puniſhment enough for ſo high an offence; yet this is all that I hear of from ſo indulgent a father, ſaving that he makes up the reſt with ſorrow, puniſhing his ſon's outrage in himſelf. The better natured, and more gracious a man is, the more ſubject he is to the danger of an over-remiſſneſs, and the exceſs of favour and mercy. The mild injuſtice is no leſs perilous to the common-wealth, than the cruel.

If *David*, perhaps out of the conſcience of his own late offence, will not puniſh this fact, his ſon *Abſalom* ſhall; not out of any care of juſtice, but in a deſire of revenge. Two whole years hath this ſly courtier ſmothered his indignation, and feigned kindneſs, elſe his invitation of *Amnon*, in ſpecial, had been ſuſpected. Even gallant *Abſalom* was a great ſheep-maſter. The bravery and magnificence of a courtier muſt be built upon the grounds of frugality. *David* himſelf is bidden to this bloody ſheep-ſhearing: it was no otherways meant, but that the father's eyes ſhould be the witneſſes of the tragical execution of one ſon by another; only *David*'s love kept him from that horrible ſpectacle. He is careful not to be charge-

able to that ſon who cares not to overcharge his father's ſtomach with a feaſt of blood.

Amnon hath ſo quite forgot his ſin, that he dares go to feaſt in that houſe where *Tamar* was mourning, and ſuſpects not the kindneſs of him, whom he had deſerved, of a brother to make an enemy. Nothing is more unſafe to be truſted, than the fair looks of a feſtered heart. Where true charity or juſt ſatisfaction have not wrought a ſound reconciliation, malice doth but lurk for the opportunity of an advantage.

It was not for nothing that *Abſalom* deferred his revenge, which is now ſo much more exquiſite, as it is longer protracted. What could be more fearful, than, when *Amnon*'s heart was merry with wine, to be ſuddenly ſtricken with death? as if this execution had been no leſs intended to the ſoul, than to the body. How wickedly ſoever this was done by *Abſalom*, yet how juſt was it with God, that he, who in two years impunity would find no leiſure of repentance, ſhould now receive a puniſhment without poſſibility of repentance?

O God, thou art righteous to reckon for thoſe ſins which human partiality or negligence hath omitted; and, while thou puniſheſt ſin with ſin, to puniſh ſin with death. If either *David* had called *Amnon* to account for this villany, or *Amnon* had called himſelf, the revenge had not been ſo deſperate. Happy is the man, that, by an unfeigned repentance, acquits his ſoul from his known evils, and improves the days of his peace to the prevention of future vengeance, which, if it be not done, the hand of God ſhall as ſurely overtake us in judgment, as the hand of Satan hath overtaken us in miſcarriage unto ſin.

CONTEM. VII. ABSALOM'S *return and conſpiracy.*

ONE act of injuſtice draws on another: the injuſtice of *David*, in not puniſhing the rape of *Amnon*, procures the injuſtice of *Abſalom*, in puniſhing *Amnon* with murder. That which the father ſhould have juſtly revenged, and did not, the ſon revenges unjuſtly. The rape of a ſiſter was no leſs worthy of death, than the murder of a brother; yea, this latter ſin was therefore the leſs, becauſe that brother was worthy of death, though by another hand; whereas that ſiſter was guilty of nothing but modeſt beauty: yet he that knew this rape paſſed over whole two years of impunity, dares not truſt the mercy of a father in the pardon of his murder; but for three years hides his head in the court of his grand-father, the king of *Geſhur*. Doubtleſs, that heatheniſh prince gave him a kind welcome, for ſo meritorious a revenge of the diſhonour done to his own loins.

No man can tell, how *Abſalom* ſhould have ſped from the hands of his otherways over-indulgent father, if he had been apprehended in the heat of the fact. Even the largeſt love may be over-ſtrained, and may give a fall in the breaking: theſe fearful effects of lenity might perhaps have whetted the ſeverity of *David*, to ſhut up theſe outrages in blood. Now this diſpleaſure was weakened with age. Time and thoughts have digeſted this hard morſel. *David*'s heart told him, that his hands had a ſhare in this offence; that *Abſalom* did but give that ſtroke which himſelf had wrongfully forborn; that the unrecoverable loſs of one ſon would be but wofully relieved with the loſs of another; he therefore, that in the news of the deceaſed infant could change his clothes, and waſh himſelf, and cheer up his ſpirits, with the reſolution of, *I ſhall go to him, he ſhall not return*

to

to me, comforts himſelf concerning *Amnon;* and begins to long for *Abſalom.*

Thoſe three years baniſhment ſeemed not ſo much a puniſhment to the ſon, as to the father. Now *David* begins to forgive himſelf; yet, out of his wiſdom, ſo inclines to favour, that he conceals it; and yet ſo conceals it, that it may be deſcried by a cunning eye; if he had caſt out no glances of affection, there had been no hopes for his *Abſalom;* if he had made profeſſion of love after ſo foul an act, there had been no ſafety for others; now, he lets fall ſo much ſecret grace as may both hold up *Abſalom* in the life of his hopes, and not hearten the preſumption of others.

Good eyes ſee light through the ſmalleſt chink. The wit of *Joab* hath ſoon diſcerned *David*'s reſerved affection, and knows how to ſerve him in that which he would, and would not accompliſh; and now deviſes how to bring into the light that birth of deſire, whereof he knew *David* was both big, and aſhamed. A woman of *Tekoah* (that ſex hath been ever held more apt for wiles) is ſuborned to perſonate a mourner, and to ſay that, by way of parable, which, in plain terms, would have ſounded too harſhly; and now, while ſhe lamentably lays forth the loſs and danger of her ſons, ſhe ſhews *David* his own; and, while ſhe moves compaſſion to her pretended iſſue, ſhe wins *David* to a pity of himſelf, and a favourable ſentence for *Abſalom.* We love ourſelves better than others, but we ſee others better than ourſelves: whoſo would perfectly know his own caſe, let him view it in another's perſon.

Parables ſped well with *David:* one drew him to repent of his own ſin, another to remit *Abſalom*'s puniſhment: and now, as glad to hear this plea, and willing to be perſuaded unto that, which, if he durſt, he would have ſought for, he gratifies *Joab* with the grant of that ſuit, which *Joab* more gratified him in

in ſuing for; *Go, bring again the young man* Abſalom.

How glad is *Joab*, that he hath light upon one act, for which the ſun, both ſetting and riſing, ſhould ſhine upon him! and now he ſpeeds to *Geſhur*, to fetch back *Abſalom* to *Jeruſalem*: he may bring the long-baniſhed prince to the city; but to the court he may not bring him. *Let him turn to his own houſe, and let him not ſee my face.*

The good king hath ſo ſmarted with mercy, that now he is reſolved upon auſterity, and will relent but by degrees; it is enough for *Abſalom* that he lives, and may now breathe in his native air; *David*'s face is no object for the eyes of murderers. What a darling this ſon was to his father appears in that, after an unnatural and barbarous rebellion, paſſionate *David* wiſhes to have changed lives with him; yet now, while his bowels yearned, his brow frowned: the face may not be ſeen, where the heart is ſet.

The beſt of God's ſaints may be blinded with affection; but when they ſhall once ſee their errors, they are careful to correct them. Wherefore ſerves the power of grace, but to ſubdue the inſolencies of nature? It is the wiſdom of parents, as to hide their hearts from their beſt children, ſo to hide their countenances from the ungracious: fleſhly reſpects may not abate their rigour to the ill-deſerving. For the child to ſee all his father's love, it is enough to make him wanton, and of wanton wicked. For a wicked child to ſee any of his father's love, it emboldens him in evil, and draws on others.

Abſalom's houſe is made his priſon; juſtly is he confined to the place which he had ſtained with blood. Two years doth he live in *Jeruſalem*, without the happineſs of his father's ſight; it was enough for *David* and him to ſee the ſmoke of each other's chimneys. In the mean time, how impatient is *Abſalom* of this ab-

abſence! He ſends for *Joab*, the ſolicitor of his return; ſo hard an hand doth wiſe and holy *David* carry over his reduced ſon, that his friendly interceſſor, *Joab*, dares not viſit him.

He, that afterwards kindled that ſeditious fire over all *Iſrael*, ſets fire now on the field of *Joab*; whom love cannot draw to him, fear and and anger ſhall. Continued diſpleaſure hath made *Abſalom* deſperate; five years are paſſed ſince he ſaw the face of his father, and now is he no leſs weary of his life, than of this delay. *Wherefore am I come down from Geſhur? It had been better for me to have been there ſtill. Now therefore let me ſee the king's face; and, if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me.* Either baniſhment, or death, ſeemed as tolerable to him, as the debarring of his father's ſight.

What a torment ſhall it be to the wicked to be ſhut out for ever from the preſence of a God, without all poſſible hopes of recovery? This was but a father of the fleſh, by whom if *Abſalom* lived at firſt, yet in him he lived not, yea not without him only, but againſt him that ſon found he could live. God is the Father of ſpirits, in whom we ſo live, that without him can be no life, no being; to be ever exluded from him, in whom we live and are, what can it be, but an eternal dying, an eternal periſhing! If in thy preſence, O God, be the fulneſs of joy, in thine abſence muſt needs be the fulneſs of horror and torment. *Hide not thy face from us, O Lord, but ſhew us the light of thy countenance, that we may live and praiſe thee.*

Even the fire of *Joab*'s field warmed the heart of *David*, while it gave him proof of the heat of *Abſalom*'s filial affection. As a man therefore inwardly weary of ſo long diſpleaſure, at laſt he receives *Abſalom* to his ſight, to his favour, and ſeals his pardon with a kiſs. Natural parents know not how to retain

an everlaſting anger towards the fruit of their loins; how much leſs ſhall the God of mercies be unreconcilably diſpleaſed with his own, and ſuffer his wrath to burn like fire that cannot be quenched! *He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever; his wrath endureth but a moment; in his favour is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.*

Abſalom is now as great as fair; beauty and greatneſs make him proud; pride works his ruin: great ſpirits will not reſt content with a moderate proſperity. Ere two years be run out, *Abſalom* runs out into a deſperate plot of rebellion; none but his own father was above him in *Iſrael;* none was ſo likely, in human expectation, to ſucceed his father. If his ambition could but have contained itſelf for a few years, as *David* was now near his period, dutiful carriage might have procured that by ſucceſſion, which now he ſought by force. An aſpiring mind is ever impatient, and holds time itſelf an enemy, if it thruſt itſelf importunately betwixt the hopes and fruition. Ambition is never but in travail, and can find no intermiſſion of painful throws, till ſhe have brought forth her abortive deſires. How happy were we, if our affection could be ſo eager of ſpiritual and heavenly promotions! O that my ſoul could find itſelf ſo reſtleſs, till it feel the weight of that crown of glory!

Outward pomp, and unwonted ſhews of magnificence, are wont much to affect the light minds of the vulgar. *Abſalom*, therefore, to the incomparable comelineſs of his perſon, adds the unuſual ſtate of a more than princely equipage. His chariots rattle, and his horſes trample proudly in the ſtreets; fifty foot-men run before their glittering maſter; *Jeruſalem* rings of their glorious prince, and is ready to adore theſe continual triumphs of peace. Exceſs and novelty of expenſive bravery and oſtentation, in pu-

blic perſons, gives juſt cauſe to ſuſpect either vanity, or a plot. True-hearted *David* can miſdoubt nothing in him, to whom he had both given life, and forgiven this. Love conſtrued all this, as meant to the honour of a father's court, to the expreſſion of joy and thankfulneſs for his reconcilement. The eyes and tongues of men are thus taken up; now hath *Abſalom* laid ſnares for their hearts alſo; *He riſes early, and ſtands beſide the way of the gate.* Ambition is no niggard of her pains; ſeldom ever is good meaning ſo induſtrious. The more he ſhined in beauty and royal attendance, ſo much more glory it was to neglect himſelf, and to prefer the care of juſtice to his own eaſe. Neither is *Abſalom* more painful than plauſible; his ear is open to all plaintiffs, all petitioners: there is no cauſe which he flatters not, *See thy matters are good and right;* his hand flatters every comer with a ſalutation, his lips with a kiſs. All men, all matters are ſoothed, ſaving the ſtate and government; the cenſure of that is no leſs deep, than the applauſe of all others, *There is none deputed of the king to hear thee.* What inſinuations could be more powerful? No muſic can be ſo ſweet, to the ears of the unſtable multitude, as to hear well of themſelves, ill of their governors: *Abſalom* needs not to wiſh himſelf upon the bench; every man ſays, O what a courteous prince is *Abſalom!* what a juſt and careful ruler would *Abſalom* be! how happy were we, if we might be judged by *Abſalom!* Thoſe qualities, which are wont ſingle to grace others, have conſpired to meet in *Abſalom;* goodlineſs of perſon, magnificence of ſtate, gracious affability, unwearied diligence, humility in greatneſs, feeling pity, love of juſtice, care of the common-wealth! The world hath not ſo complete a prince as *Abſalom!* Thus the hearts of the people are not won, but ſtolen, by a cloſe traitor, from their lawfully anointed ſovereign.

Over-

Over-fair ſhews are a juſt argument of unſoundneſs; no natural face hath ſo clear a white and red as the painted. Nothing wants now but a cloak of religion, to perfect the treachery of that ungracious ſon, who carried peace in his name, war in his heart; and how eaſily is that put on? *Abſalom* hath an holy vow to be paid in *Hebron;* the devout man had made it long ſince, while he was exiled in *Syria*, and now he haſtes to perform it: *If the Lord ſhall bring me back again to* Jeruſalem, *then I will ſerve the Lord.* Wicked hypocrites care not to play with God, that they may mock men. The more deformed any act is, the fairer vizard it ſtill ſeeketh.

How glad is the good old king, that he is bleſſed with ſo godly a ſon, whom he diſmiſſeth laden with his cauſeleſs bleſſings! What truſt is there in fleſh and blood, when *David* is not ſafe from his own loins! The conſpiracy is now fully forged; there lacked nothing but this guilt of piety to win favour and value in all eyes; and now it is a wonder, that but two hundred honeſt citizens go up with *Abſalom* from *Jeruſalem*: the true-hearted ly moſt open to credulity. How eaſy is it to beguile harmleſs intentions! The name of *David*'s ſon carries them againſt the father of *Abſalom;* and now theſe ſimple *Iſraelites* are unwittingly made loyal rebels. Their hearts are free from a plot, and they mean nothing but fidelity in the attendance of a traitor. How many thouſands are thus ignorantly miſled into the train of error; their ſimplicity is as worthy of pity, as their miſguidance of indignation. Thoſe that will ſuffer themſelves to be carried with ſemblances of truth and faithfulneſs, muſt needs be as far from ſafety as innocence.

BOOK SIXTEENTH.

CONTEM. 1. SHIMEI *cursing.*

WITH an heavy heart, and a covered head, and a weeping eye, and bare feet, is *David* gone away from *Jeruſalem;* never did he with more joy come up to this city, than now he left it with ſorrow; how could he do otherways, whom the inſurrection of his own ſon drove out from his houſe, from his throne, from the ark of God! And now, when the depth of this grief deſerved nothing but compaſſion, the foul mouth of *Shimei* entertains *David* with curſes! There is no ſmall cruelty in the picking out of a time for miſchief; that word would ſcatce gall at one ſeaſon, which at another killeth. The ſame ſhaft flying with the wind pierces deep, which, againſt it, can hardly find ſtrength to ſtick upright. The valour and juſtice of children condemns it, for injuriouſly cowardly, to ſtrike their adverſary when he is once down. It is the murder of the tongue to inſult upon thoſe whom God hath humbled, and to draw blood of that back which is yet blue from the hand of the Almighty. If *Shimei* had not preſumed upon *David*'s dejection, he durſt not have been thus bold; now he, that perhaps durſt not have looked at one of theſe worthies ſingle, deſies them all at once, and doth both caſt and ſpeak ſtones againſt *David* and all his army. The malice of baſe ſpirits ſometimes carries them further than the courage of the valiant.

In all the time of *David*'s proſperity, we heard no news of *Shimei*; his ſilence and colourable obedience made him paſs for a good ſubject; yet all that while was his heart unſound and traiterous. Peace and good ſucceſs hides many a falſe heart, like as the ſnow-drift covers

covers an heap of dung, which, once melting away, deſcries the rottenneſs that lay within. Honour and welfare are but flattering glaſſes of mens affections. Adverſity will not deceive us, but will make a true report, as of our own powers, ſo of the diſpoſition of others.

He, that ſmiled on *David* in his throne, curſed him in his flight. If there be any quarrels, any exceptions to be taken againſt a man, let him look to have them laid in his diſh when he fares the hardeſt. This practice have wicked men learned of their maſter, to take the utmoſt advantages of our afflictions. He that ſuffers had need to be double armed, both againſt pain and cenſure.

Every word of *Shimei* was a ſlander. He, that took *Saul*'s ſpear from his head, and repented to have but cut the lap of his garment, is reproached as a man of blood. The man after God's own heart is branded for a man of *Belial*. He, that was ſent for out of the fields to be anointed, is taxed for an uſurper: if *David*'s hands were ſtained with blood, yet not of *Saul*'s houſe; it was his ſervant, not his maſter that bled by him; yet is the blood of the Lord's anointed caſt in *David*'s teeth, by the ſpite of a falſe tongue. Did we not ſee *David*, afer all the proofs of his humble loyalty, ſhedding the blood of that *Amalekite*, who did but ſay he ſhed *Saul*'s? Did we not hear him lament paſſionately for the death of ſo ill a maſter, chiding the mountains of *Gilboa* on which he fell; and angerly wiſhing, that no dew might fall where that blood was poured out; and charged the daughters of *Iſrael* to weep over *Saul*, who had clothed them in ſcarlet? Did we not hear and ſee him inquiring for any remainder of the houſe of *Saul*, that he might ſhew him the kindneſs of God? Did we not ſee him honouring lame *Mephiboſheth* with a princely ſeat at his own table? Did we not ſee him revenging

ging the blood of his rival *Iſhboſheth*, upon the heads of *Rechab* and *Baanah?* What could any living man have done more to wipe off theſe bloody aſperſions? Yet is not a *Shimei* aſhamed to charge innocent *David* with all the blood of the houſe of *Saul.*

How is it likely this clamorous wretch had ſecretly traduced the name of *David,* all the time of his government, that dares thus accuſe him to his face, before all the mighty men of *Iſrael,* who were witneſſes of the contrary? The greater the perſon is, the more open do his actions ly to miſinterpretation and cenſure. Every tongue ſpeaks partially, according to the intereſt he hath in the cauſe, or the patient. It is not poſſible that eminent perſons ſhould be free from imputations: innocence can no more proteſt them than power.

If the patience of *David* can digeſt this indignity, his train cannot; their fingers could not but itch to return iron for ſtones. If *Shimei* rail on *David, Abiſhai* rails on *Shimei; Shimei* is of *Saul*'s family, *Abiſhai* of *David*'s; each ſpeaks for his own. *Abiſhai* moſt juſtly bends his tongue againſt *Shimei,* as *Shimei* againſt *David* moſt unjuſtly. Had *Shimei* been any other than a dog, he had never ſo rudely barked at an harmleſs paſſenger; neither could he deſerve leſs than the loſs of that head which had uttered ſuch blaſphemies againſt God's anointed. The zeal of *Abiſhai* doth but plead for juſtice, and is checked; *What have I to do with you, ye ſons of* Zeruiah? *David* ſaid not ſo much to his reviler, as to his abettor: he well ſaw that a revenge was juſt, but not ſeaſonable; he found the preſent a fit time to ſuffer wrongs, not to right them: he therefore gives way rather meekly to his own humiliation, than to the puniſhment of another. There are ſeaſons wherein lawful motions are not fit to be cheriſhed; anger doth not become a mourner; one paſſion at once is enough for the

the ſoul. Unadviſed zeal may be more prejudicial, than a cold remiſſneſs.

What if the Lord, for the correction of his ſervant, had ſaid unto *Shimei*, Curſe *David;* yet is *Shimei*'s curſe no leſs worthy of *Abiſhai*'s ſword: the ſin of *Shimei*'s curſe was his own, the ſmart of the curſe was God's. God wills that as *David*'s chaſtiſement, which he hates as *Shimei*'s wickedneſs: that lewd tongue moved from God, it moved lewdly from Satan. Wicked men are never the freer from guilt or puniſhment, for that hand which the holy God hath in their offenſive actions; yet *David* can ſay, *Let him alone, and let him curſe, for the Lord hath bidden him;* as meaning to give a reaſon of his own patience, rather than *Shimei*'s impunity. The iſſue ſhewed, how well *David* could diſtinguiſh betwixt the act of God, and of a traitor; how he could both kiſs the rod, and burn it. There can be none ſo ſtrong motive of our meek ſubmiſſion to evils, as the acknowledgment of their original. He, that can ſee the hand of God ſtriking him by the hand or tongue of an enemy, ſhall more awe the firſt mover of his harm, than malign the inſtrument. Even while *David* laments the rebellion of his ſon; he gains by it, and makes that the argument of his patience, which was the exerciſe of it. *Behold, my ſon, which came forth of my bowels, ſeeketh my life; how much more now may this* Benjamite *do it?* The wickedneſs of an *Abſalom* may rob his father of comfort, but ſhall help to add to his father's goodneſs. It is the advantage of great croſſes, that they ſwallow up the leſs. One man's ſin cannot be excuſed by another's, the leſſer by the greater. If *Abſalom* be a traitor, *Shimei* may not curſe and rebel: but the paſſion conceived from the indignity of a ſtranger, may be abated by the harder meaſure of our own; if we can therefore ſuffer, becauſe we have ſuffered, we have

have profited by our affliction. A weak heart faints with every addition of ſucceeding trouble; the ſtrong recollects itſelf, and is grown ſo ſkilful, that it bears off one miſchief with another.

It is not either the unnatural inſurrection of *Abſalom*, nor the unjuſt curſes of *Shimei*, that can put *David* quite out of heart: *It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and will requite good for his curſing, this day.* So well was *David* acquainted with the proceedings of God, that he knew cheriſhing was ever wont to follow ſtripes; after vehement evacuation, cordials; after a dark night, the clear light of the morning. Hope therefore doth not only uphold, but cheer up his heart, in the midſt of his ſorrow. If we can look beyond the cloud of our affliction, and ſee the ſun-ſhine of comfort on the other ſide of it, we cannot be ſo diſcouraged with the preſence of evil, as heartened with the iſſue: as, on the contrary, let a man be never ſo merry within, and ſee pain and miſery waiting for him at the door, his expectation of evil ſhall eaſily daunt all the ſenſe of his pleaſure. The retributions of temporal favours go but by peradventures; *It may be the Lord will look on mine affliction;* of eternal, are certain and infallible; if we ſuffer, we ſhall reign; why ſhould not the aſſurance of reigning make us triumph in ſuffering?

David's patience draws on the inſolence of *Shimei*. Evil natures grow preſumptuous upon forbearance. In good diſpoſitions, injury unanſwered grows weary of itſelf, and dies in a voluntary remorſe; but in thoſe dogged ſtomachs, which are only capable of the reſtraints of fear, the ſilent digeſtion of a former wrong provokes a ſecond. Mercy had need to be guided with wiſdom, leſt it prove cruel to itſelf.

O the baſe minds of inconſtant time-ſervers! Stay but a while, till the wheel be a little turned, you ſhall

ſhall ſee humble *Shimei* fall down on his face before *David*, in his return over *Jordan:* now his ſubmiſſion ſhall equal his former rudeneſs; his prayers ſhall requite his curſes, his tears make amends for his ſtones: *Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me; neither do thou remember that which thy ſervant did perverſly, the day that my lord the king went out of* Jeruſalem, *that the king ſhould take it to heart; for thy ſervant doth know that I have ſinned.* Falſe-hearted *Shimei*, had *Abſalom* proſpered, thou hadſt not ſinned, thou hadſt not repented; then hadſt thou bragged of thine inſultation over his miſeries, whoſe pardon thou now beggeſt with tears. The changes of worldly minds are thankleſs, ſince they are neither wrought out of conſcience nor love, but only by ſlaviſh fear of juſt puniſhment.

David could ſay no more to teſtify his ſorrow, for his heinous ſins againſt God, to *Nathan*, than *Shimei* ſays of himſelf to *David*, whereto may be added the advantage of a voluntary confeſſion in this offender, which in *David* was extorted by the reproof of a prophet; yet is *David*'s confeſſion ſeriouſly penitent, *Shimei*'s craftily hypocritical. Thoſe alterations are juſtly ſuſpected, which are ſhaped according to the times and outward occaſions. The true penitent looks only at God and his ſin, and is changed when all other things are themſelves.

Great offences had need of anſwerable ſatisfaction. As *Shimei* was the only man, of the houſe of *Benjamin*, that came forth and curſed *David* in his flight, ſo is he the firſt man (even before thoſe of the houſe of *Joſeph*, though nearer in ſituation) that comes to meet *David* in his return with prayers and gratulations. Notorious offenders may not think to ſit down with the taſk of ordinary ſervices; the retributions of their obedience muſt be proportionable to their crimes.

Contem. II. Achitophel.

SO ſoon as *David* heard of *Achitophel*'s hand in that conſpiracy, he falls to his prayers, *O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counſel of* Achitophel *into fooliſhneſs*. The known wiſdom of his revolted counſellor made him a dangerous and dreadful adverſary. Great parts miſemployed cannot but prove moſt miſchievous. When wickedneſs is armed with wit and power, none but a God can defeat it; when we are matched with a ſtrong and ſubtile enemy, it is high time, if ever, to be devout. If the bounty of God have thought good to furniſh his creatures with powers to war againſt himſelf, his wiſdom knows how to turn the abuſe of thoſe powers to the ſhame of the owners, and the glory of the giver.

O the policy of this *Machiavel* of *Iſrael*, no leſs deep than hell itſelf! *Go in to thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the houſe; and when all* Iſrael *ſhall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father, the hands of all that are with thee ſhall be ſtrong*. The firſt care muſt be to ſecure the faction. There can be no ſafety in ſiding with a doubtful rebel. If *Abſalom* be a traitor, yet he is a ſon. Nature may return to itſelf, *Abſalom* may relent, *David* may remit; where then are we that have helped to promote the conſpiracy; the danger is ours, while this breach may be pieced. There is no way but to engage *Abſalom* in ſome further act, uncapable of forgiveneſs: beſides the throne, let him violate the bed of his father; unto his treaſon let him add an inceſt no leſs unnatural; now ſhall the world ſee that *Abſalom* neither hopes nor cares for the reconciliation of a father. Our quarrel can never have any ſafe end but victory, the hope whereof depends upon the reſolution of our followers; they cannot be reſolute, but upon the unpardonable wickedneſs of their leader:

er: neither can this villany be ſhameful enough, if it be ſecret. The cloſeneſs of evil argues fear, or modeſty; neither of which can beſeem him that would be a ſucceſsful traitor. Set up a tent on the top of the houſe, and let all *Iſrael* be witneſſes of thy ſin, and thy father's ſhame. Ordinary crimes are for vulgar offenders. Let *Abſalom* ſin eminently, and do that which may make the world at once to bluſh and wonder.

Who would ever have thought that *Achitophel* had lived at court, at the council-table of a *David?* Who would think that mouth had ever ſpoken well? Yet had he been no other than as the oracle of God to the religious court of *Iſrael*, even while he was not wiſe enough to be good. Policy and grace are not always lodged under one roof. This man, while he was one of *David*'s deep counſellors, was one of *David*'s fools, that ſaid in their hearts, *There is no God;* elſe he could not have hoped to make good an evil with worſe, to build the ſucceſs of treaſon upon inceſt.

Profane hearts do ſo contrive the plots of their wickedneſs, as if there were no over-ruling power to croſs their deſigns, or to revenge them. He that ſits in heaven laughs them to ſcorn, and ſo far gives way to their ſins, as their ſins may prove plagues unto themſelves.

Theſe two ſons of *David* met with peſtilent counſel; *Amnon* is adviſed to inceſt with his ſiſter, *Abſalom* is adviſed to inceſt with his father's concubines; that by *Jonadab*, this by *Achitophel;* both prevail. It is as eaſy at leaſt to take ill counſel, as to give it. Proneneſs to villany in the great, cannot want either projectors to deviſe, or paraſites to execute the moſt odious ſins.

The tent is ſpread, leſt it ſhould not be conſpicuous enough, on the top of the houſe. The act is

done in the ſight of all *Iſrael*. The filthineſs of the ſin was not ſo great, as the impudency of the manner. When the prophet *Nathan* came with that heavy meſſage of reproof, and menace to *David*, after his ſin with *Bathſheba*, he could ſay from God, *Behold I will raiſe up evil againſt thee, out of thine own houſe, and will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he ſhall ly with thy wives in the ſight of this ſun: for thou didſt it ſecretly, but I will do this thing before all* Iſrael, *and before this ſun.* The counſel of *Achitophel*, and the luſt of *Abſalom*, have fulfilled the judgment of God. O the wiſdom of the Almighty, that can uſe the worſt evils well; and moſt juſtly make the ſins of men his executioners!

It was the ſin of *Reuben* that he defiled his father's bed; yet not in the ſame height of lewdneſs. What *Reuben* did in a youthful wantonneſs, *Abſalom* did in a malicious deſpite: *Reuben* ſinned with one, *Abſalom* with ten: *Reuben* ſecretly, *Abſalom* in the open eyes of heaven and earth; yet old *Jacob* could ſay of *Reuben*, *Thou ſhalt not excel; thy dignity is gone:* while *Achitophel* ſays to *Abſalom*, *Thy dignity ſhall ariſe from inceſt; climb up to thy father's bed, if thou wilt ſit in his throne. Achitophel* was a politician, *Jacob* was a prophet; if the one ſpake from carnal ſenſe, the other from divine revelation. Certainly, to ſin is not the way to proſper: whatever vain fools promiſe to themſelves, there is no wiſdom, nor underſtanding, nor counſel againſt the Lord.

After the rebellion is ſecured for continuance, the next care is, that it may end in victory; this alſo hath the working head of *Achitophel* projected. Wit and experience told him, that, in theſe caſes of aſſault, celerity uſes to bring forth the happieſt diſpatch; whereas protraction is no ſmall advantage to the defendant,

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Let me, ſaith he, *chuſe out now twelve thouſand men, and I will up, and follow after* David *this night; and I will come upon him while he is weary and weak-handed.* No advice could be more pernicious; for, beſides the wearineſs and unreadineſs of *David* and his army, the ſpirits of that worthy leader were daunted, and dejected with ſorrow, and offered way to the violence of a ſudden aſſault. The field had been half won ere any blow ſtricken. *Achitophel* could not have been reputed ſo wiſe, if he had not learned the due proportion betwixt actions and times. He that obſerveth every wind ſhall never ſow; but he that obſerves no wind at all, ſhall never reap.

The likelieſt devices do not always ſucceed. The God that had appointed to eſtabliſh *David*'s throne, and determined *Solomon* to his ſucceſſion, finds means to croſs the plot of *Achitophel* by a leſs probable advice. *Huſhai* was not ſent back for nothing. Where God hath, in his ſecret will, decreed any event, he inclines the wills of men to approve that which may promote his own purpoſes. Neither had *Huſhai* ſo deep an head, neither was his counſel ſo ſure as that of *Achitophel*, yet his tongue ſhall refel *Achitophel*, and divert *Abſalom*. The pretences were fairer, though the grounds were unſound; firſt, to ſweeten his oppoſition, he yields the praiſe of wiſdom to his adverſary in all other counſels, that he may have leave to deny it in this; his very contradiction in the preſent, inſinuates a general allowance. Then he ſuggeſts certain apparent truths concerning *David*'s valour and ſkill, to give countenance to the inferences of his improbabilities. Laſtly, he cunningly feeds the proud humour of *Abſalom*, in magnifying the power and extent of his commands, and ends in the glorious boaſts of his fore-promiſed victory. As it is with faces, ſo with counſel, that is fair that pleaſeth. He that gives the

the utterance to words, gives alſo their ſpeed. Favour, both of ſpeech and men, is not ever according to deſert, but according to fore-ordination. The tongue of *Huſhai*, and the heart of *Abſalom* is guided by a power above their own; *Huſhai* ſhall therefore prevail with *Abſalom*, that the treaſon of *Abſalom* may not prevail. He that worketh all in all things, ſo diſpoſeth of wicked men and ſpirits, that, while they do moſt oppoſe his revealed will, they execute his ſecret, and, while they think moſt to pleaſe, they overthrow themſelves.

When *Abſalom* firſt met *Huſhai*, returned to *Jeruſalem*, he upbraided him pleaſantly with the ſcoff of his profeſſed friendſhip to *David*, *Is this thy kindneſs to thy friend?* Sometimes there is more truth in the mouth than in the heart, more in jeſt than in earneſt. *Huſhai* was a friend, his ſtay was his kindneſs; and now he hath done that for which he was left at *Jeruſalem*, diſappointed *Achitophel*, preſerved *David*; neither did his kindneſs to his friend reſt here, but, as one that was juſtly jealous of him with whom he was allowed to temporize, he miſtruſts the approbation of *Abſalom*; and, not daring to put the life of his maſter upon ſuch an hazard, he gives charge to *Zadok* and *Abiathar* of this intelligence unto *David*. We cannot be too ſuſpicious, when we have to do with thoſe that are faithleſs. We cannot be too curious of the ſafety of good princes.

Huſhai fears not to deſcry the ſecrets of *Abſalom*'s counſel: to betray a traitor is no other than a commendable work. *Zadok* and *Abiathar* are faſt within the gates of *Jeruſalem*; their ſons lay purpoſely abroad in the fields; this meſſage, that concerned no leſs than the life of *David*, and the whole kingdom of *Iſrael*, muſt be truſted with a maid. Sometimes it pleaſeth the wiſdom of God, who hath the variety of heaven and earth before him, to ſingle out weak inſtruments

ſtruments for great ſervices; and they ſhall ſerve his turn, as well as the beſt. No counſellor of ſtate could have made this diſpatch more effectual: *Jonathan* and *Ahimaaz* are ſent, deſcried, purſued, preſerved. The fidelity of a maid inſtructed them in their meſſage, the ſubtilty of a woman ſaved their lives. At the well of *Rogel* they received their meſſage, in the well of *Bahurim* was their life ſaved: the ſudden wit of a woman hath choked the mouth of her well with dried corn, that it might not bewray the meſſengers; and now *David* hears ſafely of his danger, and prevents it; and, though weary with travel, and laden with ſorrow, he muſt ſpend the night in his remove. God's promiſes of his deliverance, and the confirmation of his kingdom, may not make him neglect the means of his ſafety. If he be faithful, we may not be careleſs, ſince our diligence and care are appointed for the factors of that divine Providence: the acts of God muſt abate nothing of ours; rather muſt we labour, by doing that which he requireth, to further that which he decreeth.

There are thoſe that have great wits for the public, none for themſelves. Such was *Achitophel*, who, while he had power to govern a ſtate, could not tell how to rule his own paſſions: never till now do we find his counſel baulked, neither was it now rejected as ill, only *Huſhai*'s was allowed for better: he can live no longer now, that he is beaten at his own weapon; this alone is cauſe enough to ſaddle his aſs, and to go home, and put the halter about his own neck. Pride cauſes men both to miſinterpret diſgraces, and to over-rate them. Now is *David*'s prayer heard, Achitophel's *counſel is turned into fooliſhneſs*. Deſperate *Achitophel*, what if thou be not the wiſeſt man of all *Iſrael?* even thoſe that have not attained to the higheſt pitch of wiſdom have found contentment in a mediocrity: what if thy counſel were deſpiſed?

deſpiſed? A wiſe man knows to live happily, in ſpite of an unjuſt contempt: what madneſs is this, to revenge another man's reputation upon thyſelf? and, while thou ſtriveſt for the higheſt room of wiſdom, to run into the groſſeſt extremity of folly? Worldly wiſdom is no protection from ſhame and ruin. How eaſily may a man, though naturally wiſe, be made weary of life! A little pain, a little ſhame, a little loſs, a ſmall affront, can ſoon rob a man of all comfort, and cauſe his own hands to rob him of himſelf. If there be not higher reſpects than the world can yield, to maintain us in being, it ſhould be a miracle if indignation did not kill more than diſeaſe. Now, that God, by whoſe appointment we live here, for his moſt wiſe and holy purpoſes, hath found means to make life ſweet, and death terrible.

What a mixture do we find here of wiſdom and madneſs! *Achitophel* will needs hang himſelf; there is madneſs: he will yet ſet his houſe in order; there is an act of wiſdom. And could it be poſſible that he, who was ſo wiſe as to ſet his houſe in order, ſhould be ſo mad as to hang himſelf! that he ſhould be careful to order his houſe, who regarded not to order his impotent paſſions! that he ſhould care for his houſe, who cared not for either body or ſoul! How vain it is for a man to be wiſe, if he be not wiſe in God! How prepoſterous are the cares of idle worldlings, that prefer all other things to themſelves, and, while they look at what they have in their coffers, forget what they have in their breaſts!

CONTEM. III. *The death of* ABSALOM.

THE ſame God, that raiſed enmity to *David* from his own loins, procured him favour from foreigners; ſtrangers ſhall relieve him, whom his own ſon perſecutes: here is not a loſs, but an exchange of

love

love. Had *Abſalom* been a ſon of *Ammon*, and *Shobi* a ſon of *David*, *David* had found no cauſe of complaint. If God takes with one hand, he gives with another; while that divine bounty ſerves us in good meat, though not in our own diſhes, we have good reaſon to be thankful. No ſooner is *David* come to *Mehanaim*, than *Barzillai*, *Machir*, and *Shobi* refreſh him with proviſions. Who ever ſaw any child of God left utterly deſtitute! Whoſoever be the meſſenger of our aid, we know whence he comes; heaven ſhall want power, and earth means, before any of the houſhold of faith ſhall want maintenance.

He, that formerly was forced to employ his arms for his defence againſt a tyrannous father-in-law, muſt now buckle them on againſt an unnatural ſon: now therefore he muſters his men, and ordains his commanders, and marſhals his troops; and, ſince their loyal importunity will not allow the hazard of his perſon, he, at once, encourages them by his eye, and reſtrains them with his tongue, *Deal gently with the young man* Abſalom *for my ſake.* How unreaſonably favourable are the wars of a father! O holy *David*, what means this ill-placed love, this unjuſt mercy! Deal gently with a traitor! but of all traitors with a ſon! of all ſons with an *Abſalom*, the graceleſs darling of ſo good a father! and all this for my ſake, whoſe crown, whoſe blood he hunts after! For whoſe ſake ſhould *Abſalom* be purſued, if he muſt be forborn for thine! He was ſtill courteous to thy followers, affable to ſuitors, plauſible to all *Iſrael*, only to thee he is cruel. Wherefore are thoſe arms, if the cauſe of the quarrel muſt be a motive of mercy! Yet thou ſayſt, *Deal gently with the young man* Abſalom *for my ſake.* Even in the holieſt parents, nature may be guilty of an injurious tenderneſs, of a bloody indulgence.

Or, whether ſhall we not rather think this was done in type of that unmeaſurable mercy of the true King, and Redeemer of *Iſrael*, who prayed for his perſecutors, for his murderers; and, even while they were at once ſcorning and killing him, could ſay, *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.* If we be ſons, we are ungracious, we are rebellious, yet ſtill is our heavenly Father thus compaſſionately regardful of us. *David* was not ſure of his ſucceſs; there was great inequality in the number; *Abſalom*'s forces were more than double to his; it might have come to the contrary iſſue, that *David* ſhould have been forced to ſay, *Deal gently with the father of* Abſalom; but, in a ſuppoſition of that victory, which only the goodneſs of his cauſe bade him hope for, he ſaith, *Deal gently with the young man* Abſalom. As for us, we are never but under mercy; our God needs no advantages to ſweep us from the earth any moment, yet he continues that life, and thoſe powers to us, whereby we provoke him, and bids his angels deal kindly with us, and bear us in their arms, while we lift up our hands, and bend our tongues againſt heaven. O mercy paſt the comprehenſion of all finite ſpirits, and only to be conceived by him whoſe it is! never more reſembled by any earthly affection, than by this of his deputy and type, *Deal gently with the young man* Abſalom *for my ſake.*

The battle is joined; *David*'s followers are but an handful to *Abſalom*'s. How eaſily may the fickle multitude be tranſported to the wrong ſide! What they wanted in abettors, is ſupplied in the cauſe. Unnatural ambition draws the ſword of *Abſalom*, *David*'s, a neceſſary and juſt defence. They, that in ſimplicity of heart followed *Abſalom*, cannot, in malice of heart, perſecute the father of *Abſalom*. With what courage could any *Iſraelite* draw his ſword againſt a *David*?

David? or, on the other ſide, who can want courage to fight for a righteous ſovereign and father, againſt the conſpiracy of a wicked ſon? The God of hoſts, with whom it is all one to ſave with many or with few, takes part with juſtice, and lets *Iſrael* feel what it is to bear arms for a traiterous uſurper. The ſword devours twenty thouſand of them, and the wood devours more than the ſword: it muſt needs be a very univerſal rebellion, wherein ſo many periſhed. What virtue or merits can aſſure the heart of the vulgar, when ſo gracious a prince finds ſo many revolters! Let no man look to proſper by rebellion: the very thickets, and ſtakes, and pits, and wild beaſts of the wood, ſhall conſpire to the puniſhment of traitors. Amongſt the reſt, ſee how a fatal oak hath ſingled out the ringleader of this hateful inſurrection, and will at once ſerve for his hangman and gallows, by one of thoſe ſpreading arms ſnatching him away to ſpeedy execution. *Abſalom* was comely, and he knew it well enough; his hair was no ſmall piece of his beauty, nor matter of his pride: it was his wont to cut it once a year; not for that it was too long, but too heavy: his heart would have born it longer, if his neck had not complained; and now the juſtice of God hath plaitted an halter of thoſe locks; thoſe treſſes had formerly hanged looſely diſhevelled on his ſhoulders, now he hangs by them. He had wont to weigh his hair, and was proud to find it ſo heavy; now his hair poiſeth the weight of his body, and makes his burden his torment. It is no marvel, if his own hair turned traitor to him who durſt riſe up againſt his father. That part, which is miſuſed by man to ſin, is commonly employed by God to revenge; the revenge that it worketh for God, makes amends for the offence whereto it is drawn againſt God; the very beaſt whereon *Abſalom* ſat, as weary to bear ſo unnatural a burden, reſigns over his load to the tree of

juſtice: there hangs *Abſalom* between heaven and earth, as one that was hated, and abandoned both of earth and heaven; as if God meant to preſcribe this puniſhment for traitors; *Abſalom*, *Achitophel*, and *Judas* die all one death: ſo let them periſh that dare lift up their hand againſt God's anointed.

The honeſt ſoldier ſees *Abſalom* hanging in the oak, and dares not touch him; his hands were held with the charge of *David*, *Beware that none touch the young man* Abſalom. *Joab*, upon that intelligence, ſees him, and ſmites him, with no leſs than three darts. What the ſoldier forbore in obedience, the captain doth in zeal; not fearing to prefer his ſovereign's ſafety to his command, and more tendering the life of a king, and peace of his country, than the weak affection of a father. I dare not ſit judge betwixt this zeal and that obedience, betwixt the captain and the ſoldier; the one was a good ſubject, the other a good patriot; the one loved the king, the other loved *David*, and out of love diſobeyed; the one meant as well, as the other ſped. As if God meant to fulfil the charge of his anointed, without any blame of his ſubjects, it pleaſed him to execute that immediate revenge upon the rebel, which would have diſpatched him without hand or dart; only the mule and the oak conſpired to this execution; but that death would have required more leiſure, than it was ſafe for *Iſrael* to give, and ſtill life would give hope of reſcue; to cut off all fears, *Joab* lends the oak three darts to help forward ſo needful a work of juſtice. All *Iſrael* did not afford ſo firm a friend to *Abſalom* as *Joab* had been: who, but *Joab*, had ſuborned the witty widow of *Tekoah*, to ſue for the recalling of *Abſalom* from his three years exile? who but he, went to fetch him from *Geſhur* to *Jeruſalem*? who but he, went to fetch him from his houſe at *Jeruſalem*, whereto he had been two years confined, to the face, to the lips

of

of *David?* Yet now he, that was his ſolicitor for the king's favour, is his executioner againſt the king's charge. With honeſt hearts all reſpects, either of blood or friendſhip, ceaſe in the caſe of treaſon; well hath *Joab* forgotten himſelf to be a friend to him, who had forgotten himſelf to be a ſon. Even, civilly, the king is our common father, our country our common mother; nature hath no private relations, which ſhould not gladly give place to theſe; he is neither father, nor ſon, nor brother, nor friend, that conſpires againſt the common parent. Well doth he, who ſpake parables for his maſter's ſon, now ſpeak darts to his king's enemy, and pierces that heart which was falſe to ſo great a father. Thoſe darts are ſeconded by *Joab*'s followers; each man tries his weapon upon ſo fair a mark. One death is not enough for *Abſalom*, he is at once hanged, ſhot, mangled, ſtoned. Juſtly was he lift up to the oak, who had lift up himſelf againſt his father and ſovereign; juſtly is he pierced with darts who had pierced his father's heart with ſo many ſorrows; juſtly is he mangled, who hath diſmembered and divided all *Iſrael;* juſtly is he ſtoned, who not only curſed, but purſued his own parent.

Now *Joab* ſounds the retreat, and calls off his eager troops from execution; however he knew what his rebellious countrymen had deſerved in following an *Abſalom*. Wiſe commanders know how to put a difference betwixt the heads of a faction and the miſguided multitude; and can pity the one while they take revenge on the other.

So did *Abſalom* eſteem himſelf, that he thought it would be a wrong to the world to want the memorial of ſo goodly a perſon. God had denied him ſons; how juſt it was that he ſhould want a ſon, who had robbed his father of a ſon, who would have robbed himſelf of a father, his father of a kingdom? It had been pity ſo poiſonous a plant ſhould have been fruitful;

ful: his pride ſhall ſupply nature, he rears up a ſtately pillar in the king's dale, and calls it by his own name, that he might live in dead ſtones, who could not ſurvive in living iſſue; and now behold this curious pile ends in a rude heap, which ſpeaks no language but the ſhame of that carcaſe which it covers. Hear this ye glorious fools, that care not to perpetuate any memory of yourſelves to the world, but of ill-deſerving greatneſs; the beſt of this affectation is vanity; the worſt, infamy and diſhonour; whereas the memorial of the juſt ſhall be bleſſed: and if his humility ſhall refuſe an epitaph, and chuſe to hide himſelf under the bare earth, God himſelf ſhall engrave his name upon the pillar of eternity.

There now lies *Abſalom* in the pit, under a thouſand grave-ſtones, in every of which is written his everlaſting reproach. Well might this heap over-live that pillar; for when that ceaſed to be a pillar, it began to be an heap, neither will it ceaſe to be a monument of *Abſalom*'s ſhame, while there are ſtones to be found upon earth. Even at this day, very Pagans and pilgrims that paſs that way, caſt each man a ſtone unto that heap, and are wont to ſay in a ſolemn execration, Curſed be the parricide *Abſalom*, and curſed be all unjuſt perſecutors of their parents, for ever. Faſten your eyes upon this woful ſpectacle, O all ye rebellious and ungracious children, which riſe up againſt the loins and thighs from which ye fell; and know that it is the leaſt part of your puniſhment, that your carcaſes rot in the earth, and your name in ignominy; theſe do but ſhadow out thoſe eternal ſufferings of your ſouls, for your foul and unnatural diſobedience.

Abſalom is dead; who ſhall report it to his father? Surely *Joab* was not ſo much afraid of the fact, as of the meſſage. There are buſy ſpirits that love to carry news, though thankleſs, though purpoſeleſs: ſuch

was

was *Ahimaaz* the ſon of *Zadok*, who importunately thruſt himſelf into this ſervice: wiſe *Joab*, who well ſaw how unwelcome tidings muſt be the burden of the firſt poſt, diſſuades him in vain: He knew *David* too well, to employ a friend to that errand. An *Ethiopian* ſervant was a fitter bearer of ſuch a meſſage than the ſon of the prieſt. The entertainment of the perſon doth ſo follow the quality of the news, that *David* could argue afar off, *He is a good man, he cometh with good tidings*. O how welcome deſerve thoſe meſſengers to be, that bring us the glad tidings of ſalvation, that aſſure us of the foil of all ſpiritual enemies, and tell us of nothing but victories, and crowns, and kingdoms! If we think not their feet beautiful, our hearts are foul with infidelity and ſecure worldlineſs.

So wiſe is *Ahimaaz* grown by *Joab*'s intimation, that though he out-went *Cuſhi* in his pace, he ſuffers *Cuſhi* to out-go him in his tale, cunningly ſuppreſſing that part which he knew muſt be both neceſſarily delivered, and unpleaſingly received.

As our care is wont to be where our love is, *David*'s firſt word is not, how fares the hoſt? but, *How fares the young man* Abſalom. Like a wiſe and faithful meſſenger, *Cuſhi* anſwers by an honeſt inſinuation, *The enemies of my lord the king, and all that riſe againſt thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is;* implying both what was done, and why *David* ſhould approve it being done. How is the good king thunder-ſtruck with that word of his blackmoor! who, as if he were at once bereaved of all comfort, and cared not to live but in the name of *Abſalom*, goes and weeps, and cries out, *O my ſon* Abſalom, *my ſon, my ſon* Abſalom, *would God I had died for thee! O* Abſalom, *my ſon, my ſon!* What is this we hear? that he whoſe life *Iſrael* valued at ten thouſand of theirs, ſhould be exchanged with a traitor's:

traitor's: that a good king, whoſe life was ſought, ſhould wiſh to lay it down for the preſervation of his murderer. The beſt men have not wont to be the leaſt paſſionate. But what ſhall we ſay to that love of thine, O Saviour, who haſt ſaid of us wretched traitors, not, *Would God I had died for you;* but I will die, I do die, I have died for you. O love, like thyſelf, infinite, incomprehenſible, whereat the angels of heaven ſtand yet amazed, wherewith thy ſaints are raviſhed! *Turn away thine eyes from me, for they overcome me. O thou that dwelleſt in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice; cauſe us to hear it;* that we may in our meaſure anſwer thy love, and enjoy it for ever.

CONTEM. IV. SHEBA'S *rebellion.*

IT was the doom which God paſſed upon the man after his own heart, by the mouth of *Nathan*, that the ſword ſhould never depart from his houſe, for the blood of *Uriah:* after that wound healed by remiſſion, yet this ſcar remains. *Abſalom* is no ſooner caſt down into the pit, than *Sheba* the ſon of *Bichri* is up in arms: if *David* be not plagued, yet he ſhall be corrected; firſt by the rod of a ſon, then of a ſubject. He had lift up his hand againſt a faithful ſubject; now a faithleſs dares to lift up his hand againſt him. Malice, like ſome hereditary ſickneſs, runs in a blood; *Saul* and *Shimei*, and *Sheba* were all of an houſe; that ancient grudge was not yet dead: the fire of the houſe of *Jemini* was but raked up, never thoroughly out; and now that, which did but ſmoke in *Shimei*, flames in *Sheba;* although, even through this chaſtiſement, it is not hard to diſcern a type of that perpetual ſucceſſion of enmity, which ſhould be raiſed againſt the true King of *Iſrael.* O ſon of *David*, when didſt thou ever want enemies! How wert thou

thou deſigned by thine eternal Father, for a ſign that ſhould be ſpoken againſt? *How did the* Gentiles *rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth aſſembled, and the rulers came together againſt thee.* Yea, how do the ſubjects of thine own kingdom daily conſpire againſt thee? Even now, while thou enjoyeſt peace, and glory at thy father's right hand, as ſoon ſhalt thou want friends as enemies upon earth.

No eye of any traitor could eſpy a juſt quarrel in the government of *David;* yet *Sheba* blows the trumpet of rebellion; and, while *Iſrael* and *Judah* are ſtriving who ſhould have the greateſt part in their re-eſtabliſhed ſovereign, he ſticks not to ſay, *We have no part in* David, *neither have we inheritance in the ſon of* Jeſſe; and, while he ſays, *Every man to his tents, O* Iſrael, he calls every man to his own; ſo, in proclaiming a liberty from a juſt and loyal ſubjection, he invites *Iſrael* to the bondage of an uſurper.

That a lewd conſpirator ſhould breathe treaſon, it is no wonder; but is it not wonder and ſhame, that, upon every mutinous blaſt, *Iſrael* ſhould turn traitor to God's anointed? It was their late expoſtulation with *David*, why their brethren, the men of *Judah*, ſhould have ſtolen him from them: now might *David* more juſtly expoſtulate, why a rebel of their brethren ſhould have ſtolen them from him. As nothing is more unſtable than the multitude, ſo nothing is more ſubject to diſtaſtes than ſovereignty; for as weak minds ſeek pleaſure in change, ſo every light conceit of irritation ſeems ſufficient colour of change: ſuch the falſe diſpoſitions of the vulgar are! Love cannot be ſecurity enough for princes, without the awfulneſs of power: what hold can there be of popularity, when the ſame hands, that even now fought for *David* to be all theirs, now fight againſt him, under the ſon of *Bichri*, as none of theirs? As bees, when they

are once up in a ſwarm, are ready to light upon every bough; ſo the *Iſraelites*, being ſtirred by the late commotion of *Abſalom*, are apt to follow every *Sheba*. It is unſafe for any ſtate, that the multitude ſhould once know the way to an inſurrection; the leaſt track in this kind is eaſily made a path. Yet, if *Iſrael* rebel, *Judah* continues faithful; neither ſhall the ſon of *David* ever be left deſtitute of ſome true ſubjects in the worſt of apoſtaſies. He, that could command all hearts, will ever be followed by ſome: God had rather glorify himſelf by a remnant.

Great commanders muſt have active thoughts: *David* is not ſo taken up with the embroiled affairs of his ſtate, as not to intend domeſtic juſtice. His ten concubines, which were ſhameleſly defiled by his inceſtuous ſon, are condemned to ward and widowhood. Had not that conſtupration been partly violent, their puniſhment had not been ſo eaſy; had it not alſo been partly voluntary, they had not been ſo much puniſhed: but how much ſoever the act did partake of either force, or will, juſtly are they ſequeſtered from *David*'s bed: *Abſalom* was not more unnatural in his rebellion than in his luſt: if now *David* ſhould have returned to his own bed, he had ſeconded the inceſt. How much more worthy of ſeparation are they, who have ſtained the marriage-bed with their wilful ſin!

Amaſa was one of the witneſſes and abettors of *Abſalom*'s filthineſs; yet is he, out of policy, received to favour and employment, while the concubines ſuffer. Great men yield many times to thoſe things, out of reaſons of ſtate, which, if they were private perſons, could not be eaſily put over. It is no ſmall wiſdom to engage a new reconciled friend, that he may be confirmed by his own act: therefore is *Amaſa* commanded to levy the forces of *Judah*. *Joab*, after many great merits and atchievements, lies ruſting in neglect:

neglect: he, that was ſo entire with *David*, as to be of his counſel for *Uriah*'s blood, and ſo firm to *David*, as to lead all his battles againſt the houſe of *Saul*, the *Ammonites*, the *Aramites*, *Abſalom*, is now caſhiered, and muſt yield his place to a ſtranger, late an enemy. Who knows not that this ſon of *Zeruiah* had ſhed the blood of war in peace? But if the blood of *Abſalom* had not been louder than the blood of *Abner*, I fear this change had not been. Now *Joab* ſmarteth for a loyal diſobedience. How ſlippery are the ſtations of earthly honours, and ſubject to continual mutability! Happy are they who are in favour with him, in whom there is no ſhadow of change!

Where men are commonly moſt ambitious to pleaſe with their firſt employments, *Amaſa* ſlackens his pace. The leaſt delay, in matters of rebellion, is perilous, may be irrecoverable. The ſons of *Zeruiah* are not ſullen; *Abiſhai* is ſent, *Joab* goes unſent to the purſuit of *Sheba*. *Amaſa* was in their way, whom no quarrel but their envy had made of a brother an enemy. Had the heart of *Amaſa* been privy to any cauſe of grudge, he had ſuſpected the kiſs of *Joab*; now his innocent eyes look to the lips, not to the hand of his ſecret enemy; the lips were ſmooth, *Art thou in health, my brother?* The hand was bloody, which ſmote him under the fifth rib; that unhappy hand knew well this way unto death, which with one wound hath let out the ſouls of two great captains, *Abner* and *Amaſa*; both they were ſmitten by *Joab*, both under the fifth rib, both under a pretence of friendſhip. There is no enmity ſo dangerous, as that which comes maſked with love. Open hoſtility calls us to our guard; but there is no fence againſt a truſted treachery. We need not be bidden to avoid an enemy; but who would run away from a friend? Thus ſpiritually deals the world with our ſouls, it kiſſes us, and ſtabs us at once: if it did not embrace

us with one hand, it could not murder us with the other: only, God deliver us from the danger of our truſt, and we ſhall be ſafe.

Joab is gone, and leaves *Amaſa* wallowing in blood; that ſpectacle cannot but ſtay all paſſengers. The death of great perſons draws ever many eyes: each man ſays, *Is not this my lord* Amaſa? Wherefore do we go to fight, while our general lies in the duſt? What a ſad preſage is this of our own miſcarriage. The wit of *Joab*'s followers hath therefore ſoon both removed *Amaſa* out of the way, and covered him, not regarding ſo much the loſs, as the eye-ſore of *Iſrael*. Thus wicked politics care not ſo much for the commiſſion of villany, as for the notice. Smothered evils are as not done: if oppreſſions, if murder, if treaſons may be hid from view, the obdured heart of the offender complains not of remorſe.

Bloody *Joab*, with what face, with what heart canſt thou purſue a traitor to thy king, while thou thyſelf art ſo foul a traitor to thy friend, to thy couſin-german, and, in ſo unſeaſonable a ſlaughter, to thy ſovereign, whoſe cauſe thou profeſſeſt to revenge! If *Amaſa* were now in an act of loyalty, juſtly, on God's part, paid for the arrearages of his late rebellion, yet that it ſhould be done by thy hand, then and thus, it was flagitiouſly cruel: yet, behold, *Joab* runs away ſecurely with the fact, haſting to plague that, in another, whereof himſelf was no leſs guilty. So vaſt are the gorges of ſome conſciences, that they can ſwallow the greateſt crimes, and find no ſtrain in the paſſage.

It is poſſible for a man to be faithful to ſome one perſon, and perfidious to all others. I do not find *Joab* other than firm and loyal to *David*, in the midſt of all his private falſhoods, whoſe juſt quarrel he purſues againſt *Sheba*, through all the tribes of *Iſrael*. None of all the ſtrong forts of revolted *Iſrael* can hide the rebel from the zeal of his revenge. The city of

Abel

Abel lends harbour to that conſpirator, whom all *Iſrael* would, and cannot protect. *Joab* caſts up a mount againſt it, and having invironed it with a ſiege, begins to work upon the wall; and now, after long chace, is in hand to dig out that vermin, which had earthed himſelf in this borough of *Bethmaachah*. Had not the city been ſtrong and populous, *Sheba* had not caſt himſelf for ſuccour within thoſe walls; yet, of all the inhabitants, I ſee not any one man move for the preſervation of their whole body: only a woman undertakes to treat with *Joab* for their ſafety. Thoſe men, whoſe ſpirits were great enough to maintain a traitor againſt a mighty king, ſcorn not to give way to the wiſdom of a matron: there is no reaſon that ſex ſhould diſparage, where the virtue and merit is no leſs than maſculine. Surely the ſoul acknowledgeth no ſex, neither is varied according to the outward frame. How oft have we known female hearts in the breaſts of men, and contrarily, manly powers in the weaker veſſels? It is injurious to meaſure the act by the perſon, and not rather to eſteem the perſon for the act.

She, with no leſs prudence than courage, challengeth *Joab* for the violence of his aſſault, and lays to him that law, which he could not be an *Iſraelite* and diſavow: the law of the God of peace, whoſe charge it was, that, when they ſhould come near to a city to fight againſt it, they ſhould offer it peace; and if this tender muſt be made to foreigners, how much more to brethren? So as they muſt inquire of *Abel* ere they battered it. War is the extreme act of vindicative juſtice; neither doth God ever approve it for any other than a deſperate remedy, and, if it have any other end than peace, it turns into public murder. It is therefore an inhuman cruelty to ſhed blood, where we have not proffered fair conditions of peace, the refuſal whereof is juſtly puniſhed with the ſword of revenge.

Joab

Joab was a man of blood; yet, when the wiſe woman of *Abel* charged him with going about to deſtroy a mother in *Iſrael*, and ſwallowing up the inheritance of the Lord, with what vehemency doth he deprecate that challenge! *God forbid, God forbid it me, that I ſhould devour or deſtroy it.* Although that city, with the reſt, had engaged itſelf in *Sheba*'s ſedition, yet how zealouſly doth *Joab* remove from himſelf the ſuſpicion of an intended vaſtation? How fearful ſhall their anſwer be, who, upon the quarrel of their own ambition, have not ſpared to waſte whole tribes of the *Iſrael* of God! It was not the faſhion of *David*'s captains to aſſault any city ere they ſummoned it; here they did. There be ſome things that, in the very fact, carry their own conviction; ſo did *Abel* in the entertaining, and abetting a known conſpirator: *Joab* challenges them for the offence, and requires no other ſatisfaction than the head of *Sheba*. This matron had not deſerved the name of wiſe and faithful in *Iſrael*, if ſhe had not both apprehended the juſtice of the condition, and commended it to her citizens, whom ſhe had eaſily perſuaded to ſpare their own heads, in not ſparing a traitor's. It had been pity thoſe walls ſhould have ſtood, if they had been too high to throw a traitor's head over.

Spiritually the caſe is ours: every man's breaſt is as a city incloſed; every ſin is a traitor that lurks within thoſe walls; God calls to us for *Sheba*'s head; neither hath he any quarrel to our perſon, but for our ſin. If we love the head of our traitor above the life of our ſoul, we ſhall juſtly periſh in the vengeance. We cannot be more willing to part with our ſin, than our merciful God is to withdraw his judgments.

Now is *Joab* returned with ſucceſs, and hopes, by *Sheba*'s head, to pay the price of *Amaſa*'s blood; *David* hates the murder, entertains the man, defers the revenge; *Joab* had made himſelf ſo great, ſo neceſſa-

ry,

ry, that *David* may neither miſs, nor puniſh him. Policy led the king to connive at that which his heart abhorred. I dare not commend that wiſdom, which holds the hands of princes from doing juſtice. Great men have ever held it a point of worldly ſtate, not always to pay where they have been conſcious to a debt of either favour or puniſhment; but to make time their ſervant for both. *Solomon* ſhall once defray the arrearages of his father. In the mean time *Joab* commands and proſpers, and *David* is fain to ſmile on that face, whereon he hath, in his ſecret deſtination, written the characters of death.

CONTEM. V. *The* GIBEONITES *revenged.*

THE reign of *David* was moſt troubleſome towards the ſhutting up, wherein both war and famine conſpire to afflict him; almoſt forty years had he ſat in the throne of *Iſrael* with competency, if not abundance of all things; now at laſt are his people viſited with a long dearth: we are not at firſt ſenſible of common evils. Three years drought and ſcarcity are gone over, ere *David* conſults with God, concerning the occaſion of the judgment; now he found it high time to ſeek the face of the Lord. The continuance of an affliction ſends us to God, and calls upon us to aſk for a reckoning; whereas, like men ſtricken in their ſleep, a ſudden blow cannot make us to find ourſelves, but rather aſtoniſheth than teacheth us.

David was himſelf a prophet of God, yet had not the Lord, all this while, acquainted him with the grounds of his proceedings againſt *Iſrael;* this ſecret was hid from him, till he conſulted with the *Urim*; ordinary means ſhall reveal that to him, which no viſion had deſcried; and if God will have prophets to have recourſe unto the prieſts, for the notice of his will, how much more muſt the people? Even thoſe that

that are inwardeſt with God muſt have uſe of the ephod.

Juſtly it is preſuppoſed by *David*, that there was never judgment from God, where hath not been a provocation from men; therefore, when he ſees the plague, he inquires for the ſin. Never man ſmarted cauſeleſly from the hand of divine juſtice. O that, when we ſuffer, we could aſk what we have done, and could guide our repentance to the root of our evils.

That God, whoſe counſels are ſecret, even where his actions are open, will not be cloſe to his prophet, to his prieſt: without inquiry we ſhall know nothing; upon inquiry nothing ſhall be concealed from us, that is fit for us to know.

Who can chuſe but wonder at once, both at *David*'s ſlackneſs in conſulting with God, and God's ſpeed in anſwering ſo ſlow a demand! He, that ſo well knew the way to God's oracle, ſuffers *Iſrael* to be three years pinched with famine, ere he aſks why they ſuffer. Even the beſt hearts may be overtaken with dulneſs in holy duties; but O the marvellous mercy of God, that takes not the advantage of our weakneſſes! *David*'s queſtion is not more ſlow, than his anſwer is ſpeedy; *It is for* Saul, *and for his bloody houſe, becauſe he ſlew the* Gibeonites. *Iſrael* was full of ſins, beſides thoſe of *Saul*'s houſe; *Saul*'s houſe was full of ſins, beſides thoſe of blood; much blood was ſhed by them, beſides that of the *Gibeonites*: yet the juſtice of God ſingles out this one ſin of violence offered to the *Gibeonites* contrary to the league made by *Joſhua*, ſome four hundred years before, for the occaſion of this late vengeance. Where the cauſes of offence are infinite, it is juſt with God to pitch upon ſome; it is merciful not to puniſh for all: well near forty years are paſt betwixt the commiſſion of the ſin, and the reckoning

for

for it. It is a vain hope that is raiſed from the delay of judgment; no time can be any prejudice to the Ancient of days: when we have forgotten our ſins, when the world hath forgotten us, he ſues us afreſh for our arrearages. The ſlaughter of the *Gibeonites* was the ſin not of the preſent, but rather of the former generation; and now poſterity pays for their fore-fathers. Even we men hold it not unjuſt to ſue the heirs and executors of our debitors: eternal payments God uſes only to require of the perſon, temporary oft-times of ſucceſſion.

As *Saul* was higher by the head and ſhoulders than the reſt of *Iſrael*, both in ſtature and dignity, ſo were his ſins more conſpicuous than thoſe of the vulgar. The eminence of the perſon makes the offence more remarkable, to the eyes both of God and men.

Neither *Saul* nor *Iſrael* were faultleſs in other kinds; yet God fixes the eye of his revenge upon the maſſacre of the *Gibeonites*. Every ſin hath a tongue, but that of blood over-cries, and drowns the reſt. He, who is mercy itſelf, abhors cruelty in his creature above all other inordinateneſs: that holy ſoul, which was heavy preſſed with the weight of an heinous adultery, yet cries out, *Deliver me from blood, O God, the God of my ſalvation, and my tongue ſhall joyfully ſing of thy righteouſneſs.*

If God would take account of blood, he might have entered the action upon the blood of *Uriah* ſpilt by *David;* or, if he would rather inſiſt in *Saul*'s houſe, upon the blood of *Abimelech* the prieſt, and fourſcore and five perſons that did wear a linen ephod: but it pleaſed the wiſdom and juſtice of the Almighty, rather to call for the blood of the *Gibeonites*, though drudges of *Iſrael*, and a remnant of *Amorites*. Why this? There was a perjury attending upon this ſlaughter? it was an ancient oath wherein the princes of the congregation had bound themſelves,

ſelves, upon *Joſhua*'s league, to the *Gibeonites*, that they would ſuffer them to live; an oath extorted by fraud, but ſolemn, by no leſs name than the Lord God of *Iſrael*. *Saul* will now, thus late, either not acknowledge it, or not keep it; out of his zeal therefore to the children of *Iſrael* and *Judah*, he roots out ſome of the *Gibeonites*, whether in a zeal of revenge of their firſt impoſture, or in a zeal of enlarging the poſſeſſions of *Iſrael*, or in a zeal of executing God's charge upon the brood of *Canaanites*: he, that ſpared *Agag* whom he ſhould have ſmitten, ſmites the *Gibeonites* whom he ſhould have ſpared. Zeal and good intention is no excuſe, much leſs a warrant for evil: God holds it an high indignity that his name ſhould be ſworn by, and violated. Length of time cannot diſpenſe with our oaths, with our vows; the vows and oaths of others may bind us, how much more our own?

There was a famine in *Iſrael*; a natural man would have aſcribed it unto the drought, and that drought, perhaps, to ſome conſtellations: *David* knows to look higher, and ſees a divine hand ſcourging *Iſrael* for ſome great offence, and over-ruling thoſe ſecond cauſes to his moſt juſt executions. Even the moſt quick-ſighted worldling is purblind to ſpiritual objects, and the weakeſt eyes of the regenerate pierce the heavens, and eſpy God in all earthly occurrences.

So well was *David* acquainted with God's proceedings, that he knew the removal of the judgment muſt begin at the ſatisfaction of the wronged. At once therefore doth he pray unto God, and treat with the *Gibeonites*; *What ſhall I do for you, and wherewith ſhall I make the atonement, that I may bleſs the inheritance of the Lord?* In vain ſhould *David*, though a prophet, bleſs *Iſrael*, if the *Gibeonites* did not bleſs them. Injuries done us on earth give us power

power in heaven; the oppreſſor is in no man's mercy, but his whom he hath trampled upon.

Little did the *Gibeonites* think, that God had ſo taken to heart their wrongs, that, for their ſakes, all *Iſrael* ſhould ſuffer. Even, when we think not of it, is the righteous Judge avenging our unrighteous vexations. Our hard meaſures cannot be hid from him; his returns are hid from us. It is ſufficient for us, that God can be no more neglective, than ignorant of our ſufferings. It is now in the power of theſe deſpiſed *Hivites* to make their own terms with *Iſrael:* neither ſilver nor gold will ſavour with them towards their ſatisfaction; nothing can expiate the blood of their fathers, but the blood of ſeven ſons of their deceaſed perſecutor. Here was no other than a juſt retaliation: *Saul* had puniſhed in them the offence of their predeceſſors; they will now revenge *Saul*'s ſin in his children. The meaſure we mete unto others is, with much equity, remeaſured unto ourſelves. Every death would not content them of *Saul*'s ſons, but a curſed and ignominious hanging on the tree; neither would that death content them, unleſs their own hands might be the executioners; neither would any place ſerve for the execution but *Gibeah*, the court of *Saul;* neither would they do any of this for the wrecking of their own fury, but for the appeaſing of God's wrath, *We will hang them up unto the Lord in* Gibeah *of* Saul.

David might not refuſe the condition: he muſt deliver, they muſt execute; he chuſes out ſeven of the ſons and grand-children of *Saul.* That houſe had raiſed long an unjuſt perſecution againſt *David*, now God pays it upon another's ſcore. *David*'s love and oath to *Jonathan* preſerves lame *Mephiboſheth;* how much more ſhall the Father of all mercies do good unto the children of the faithful, for the covenant made with their parents!

The five ſons of *Adriel* the *Meholathite*, *David*'s ancient rival in his firſt love, which were born to him by *Merab*, *Saul*'s daughter, and brought up by her barren ſiſter *Michal*, the wife of *David*, are yielded up to death; *Merab* was, after a promiſe of marriage to *David*, unjuſtly given away by *Saul* to *Adriel*; *Michal* ſeems to abet the match, in breeding the children; now, in one act, not of *David*'s ſeeking, the wrong is thus late avenged upon *Saul*, *Adriel*, *Merab*, *Michal*, the children. It is a dangerous matter to offer injury to any of God's faithful ones; if their meekneſs have eaſily remitted it, their God will not paſs it over without a ſevere retribution.

Theſe five, together with two ſons of *Rizpah*, *Saul*'s concubine, are hanged up at once before the Lord, yea and before the eyes of the world; no place but an hill will ſerve for this execution. The acts of juſtice, as they are intended for example, ſo they ſhould be done in that eminent faſhion, that may make them both moſt inſtructive, and moſt terrifying; unwarrantable courſes of private revenge ſeek to hide their heads in ſecrecy; the beautiful face of juſtice both affects the light, and becomes it.

It was the general charge of God's law, that no corps ſhould remain all night upon the gibbet; the Almighty hath power to diſpenſe with his own command; ſo doubtleſs he did in this extraordinary caſe; theſe carcaſes did not defile, but expiate. Sorrowful *Rizpah* ſpreads her a tent of ſackcloth upon the rock, for a ſad attendance upon thoſe ſons of her womb; death might bereave her of them, not them of her love. This ſpectacle was not more grievous to her, than pleaſing to God, and happy to *Iſrael*. Now the clouds drop fatneſs, and the earth runs forth into plenty. The *Gibeonites* are ſatisfied, God reconciled, *Iſrael* relieved.

How

How bleſſed a thing it is for a nation, that juſtice is unpartially executed, even upon the mighty! A few drops of blood have procured large ſhowers from heaven. A few carcaſes are a rich compoſt to the earth; the drought and dearth remove away with the breath of thoſe pledges of the offender: judgment cannot tyrannize where juſtice reigns: as, contrarily, there can be no peace where blood cries unheard, unregarded.

CONTEM. VI. *The numbering of the people.*

ISRAEL was grown wanton and mutinous; God pulls them down, firſt by the ſword, then by famine, now by peſtilence. O the wondrous, and yet juſt ways of the Almighty! Becauſe *Iſrael* hath ſinned, therefore *David* ſhall ſin, that *Iſrael* may be puniſhed; becauſe God is angry with *Iſrael*, therefore *David* ſhall anger him more, and ſtrike himſelf in *Iſrael*, and *Iſrael* through himſelf.

The Spirit of God elſewhere aſcribes this motion to Satan, which here it attributes to God; both had their hand in the work; God by permiſſion, Satan by ſuggeſtion; God as a judge, Satan as an enemy; God as in a juſt puniſhment for ſin, Satan as in an act of ſin; God in a wiſe ordination of it to good, Satan in a malicious intent of confuſion. Thus at once God moved, and Satan moved; neither is it any excuſe to Satan or *David*, that God moved; neither is it any blemiſh to God, that Satan moved; the ruler's ſin is a puniſhment to a wicked people; though they had many ſins of their own, whereon God might have grounded a judgment, yet, as before, he had puniſhed them with dearth for *Saul*'s ſin, ſo now he will not puniſh them with plagues, but for *David*'s ſin. If God were not angry with a people, he would not give up their governors to ſuch evils, as whereby he

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is provoked to vengeance; and if their governors be thus given up, the people cannot be ſafe. The body drowns not while the head is above the water, when that once ſinks, death is near; juſtly therefore are we charged to make prayers and ſupplications, as for all, ſo eſpecially for thoſe that are in eminent authority: when we pray for ourſelves, we pray not always for them; but we cannot pray for them, and not pray for ourſelves. The public weal is not compriſed in the private, but the private in the public.

What then was *David*'s ſin? He will needs have *Iſrael* and *Judah* numbered. Surely there is no malignity in numbers; neither is it unfit for a prince to know his own ſtrength; this is not the firſt time that *Iſrael* had gone under a reckoning. The act offends not, but the miſ-affection; the ſame thing had been commendably done out of a princely providence, which now, through the curioſity, pride, miſ-confidence of the doer, proves heinouſly vicious. Thoſe actions, which are in themſelves indifferent, receive either their life, or their bane, from the intentions of the agent. *Moſes* numbereth the people with thanks, *David* with diſpleaſure. Thoſe ſins, which carry the ſmootheſt foreheads, and have the moſt honeſt appearances, may more provoke the wrath of God, than thoſe which bear the moſt abomination in their faces. How many thouſand wickedneſſes paſſed through the hands of *Iſrael*, which we men would rather have branded out for judgment, than this of *David*'s! The righteous Judge of the world cenſures ſins, not by their ill-looks, but by their foul hearts.

Who can but wonder to ſee *Joab* the ſaint, and *David* the treſpaſſer? No prophet could ſpeak better than that man of blood; *The Lord thy God increaſe the people an hundred fold more than they be, and that the eyes of my lord the king may ſee it; but why doth my lord the king deſire this thing?* There

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is no man ſo lewd as not to be ſometimes in good moods, as not to diſlike ſome evil; contrarily, no man on earth can be ſo holy, as not ſometimes to overlaſh. It were pity that either *Joab* or *David* ſhould be tried by every act. How commonly have we ſeen thoſe men ready to give good advice to others, for the avoiding of ſome ſins, who, in more groſs outrages, have not had grace to counſel their own hearts? The ſame man, that had deſerved death from *David* for his treacherous cruelty, diſſuades *David* from an act that carried but a ſuſpicion of evil; it is not ſo much to be regarded, who it is that admoniſheth us, as what he brings. Good counſel is never the worſe for the foul carriage. There are ſome diſhes that we may eat, even from ſluttiſh hands.

The purpoſe of ſin in a faithful man is odious, much more the reſolution. Notwithſtanding *Joab*'s diſcreet admonition, *David* will hold on his courſe, and will know the number of the people, only that he may know it. *Joab* and the captains addreſs themſelves to the work. In things which are not in themſelves evil, it is not for ſubjects to diſpute, but to obey. That, which authority may ſin in commanding, is done of the inferior, not with ſafety only, but with praiſe. Nine months and twenty days is this general muſter in hand; at laſt the number is brought in, *Iſrael* is found eight hundred thouſand ſtrong; *Judah* five hundred thouſand; the ordinary companies which ſerved by courſe for the royal guard, four and twenty thouſand each month, needed not be reckoned; the addition of them, with their ſeveral captains raiſes the ſum of *Iſrael* to the rate of eleven hundred thouſand. A power able to puff up a carnal heart: but how can an heart that is more than fleſh truſt to an arm of fleſh? O holy *David*, whither hath a glorious vanity tranſported thee! Thou which once didſt ſing ſo ſweetly, *Put not your truſt in princes nor in the*

the ſon of man, for there is no help in him. His breath departeth, and he returneth to his earth, then his thoughts periſh. Bleſſed is he that hath the God of Jacob *for his help, whoſe hope is in the Lord his God.* How canſt thou now ſtoop to ſo unſafe and unworthy a confidence?

As ſome ſtomachful horſe that will not be ſtopt in his career with the ſharpeſt bit, but runs on headily, till he come to ſome wall or ditch, and there ſtands ſtill and trembles; ſo did *David:* all the diſſuaſions of *Joab* could not reſtrain him from his intended courſe; almoſt ten months doth he run on impetuouſly in a way of his own, rough and dangerous; at laſt his heart ſmites him; the conſcience of his offence, and the fear of judgment, have fetched him upon his knees: *O Lord, I have ſinned exceedingly in that I have done; therefore now, Lord, I beſeech thee take away the treſpaſs of thy ſervant, for I have done very fooliſhly.* It is poſſible for a ſin not to bait only, but to ſojourn in the holieſt ſoul: but, though it ſojourn there as a ſtranger, it ſhall not dwell there as an owner. The renewed heart, after ſome rovings of error, will once, ere over-long, return home to itſelf, and fall out with that ill guide wherewith it was miſled, and with itſelf for being miſled; and now it is reſolved into tears, and breathes forth nothing but ſighs, and confeſſions, and deprecations.

Here needed no *Nathan*, by a parabolical circumlocution, to fetch in *David* to a ſight and acknowledgment of his ſin: the heart of the penitent ſupplied the prophet; no other tongue could ſmite him ſo deep as his own thoughts: but though his reins chaſtiſed him in the night, yet his ſeer ſcourges him in the morning; *Thus ſaith the Lord, I offer thee three things, chuſe thee which of them I ſhall do unto thee.* But what ſhall we ſay to this? When upon the prophet's reproof, for an adultery cloaked with

with murder, *David* did but ſay, *I have ſinned*, it was preſently returned, *God hath put away thy ſin;* neither did any ſmart follow, but the death of a miſ-begotten infant; and now, when he voluntarily reproved himſelf for but a needleſs muſter, and ſought for pardon unbidden, with great humiliation, God ſends him three terrible ſcourges, famine, ſword, or peſtilence; that he may chuſe with which of them he had rather to bleed, he ſhall have the favour of an election, not of a remiſſion. God is more angered with a ſpiritual, and immediate affront offered to his majeſty, in our pride and falſe confidence in earthly things, than with a fleſhly crime, though heinouſly ſeconded.

It was an hard and woful choice, of three years famine added to three fore-paſt; or of three months flight from the ſword of an enemy, or three days peſtilence: the Almighty, that had fore-determined his judgment, refers it to *David*'s will as fully as if it were utterly undetermined. God had reſolved, yet *David* may chuſe: that infinite wiſdom hath foreſeen the very will of his creature; which, while it freely inclines itſelf to what it had rather, unwittingly wills that which was fore-appointed in heaven.

We do well believe thee, O *David*, that thou wert in a wonderful ſtrait; this very liberty is no other than fetters: thou needſt not have famine, thou needſt not have the ſword, thou needſt not have peſtilence; one of them thou muſt have: there is miſery in all, there is miſery in any; thou and thy people can die but once; and once they muſt die, either by famine, war or peſtilence. O God, how vainly do we hope to paſs over our ſins with impunity, when all the favour that *David* and *Iſrael* can receive, is to chuſe their bane!

Yet behold, neither ſins, nor threats, nor fears, can bereave a true penitent of his faith; *Let us fall now*

into the hands of the Lord, for his mercies are great. There can be no evil of puniſhment wherein God hath not an hand; there could be no famine, no ſword, without him: but ſome evils are more immediate from a divine ſtroke; ſuch was that plague into which *David* is unwillingly willing to fall. He had his choice of days, months, years, in the ſame number; and though the ſhortneſs of time, prefixed to the threatened peſtilence, might ſeem to offer ſome advantage for the leading of his election; yet God meant, and *David* knew it, herein to proportion the difference of time to the violence of the plague; neither ſhould any fewer periſh by ſo few days peſtilence, than by ſo many years famine. The wealthieſt might avoid the dearth, the ſwifteſt might run away from the ſword; no man could promiſe himſelf ſafety from that peſtilence. In likelihood, God's angel would rather ſtrike the moſt guilty: however therefore *David* might well look to be enwrapped in the common deſtruction, yet he rather chuſeth to fall into that mercy which he had abuſed, and to ſuffer from that juſtice which he had provoked; *Let us now fall into the hands of the Lord.*

Humble confeſſions and devout penance cannot always avert temporal judgments: God's angel is abroad, and, within that ſhort compaſs of time, ſweeps away ſeventy thouſand *Iſraelites*. *David* was proud of the number of his ſubjects; now they are abated, that he may ſee cauſe of humiliation in the matter of his glory. In what we have offended, we commonly ſmart. Theſe thouſands of *Iſrael* were not ſo innocent, that they ſhould only periſh for *David*'s ſin: their ſins were the motives both of this ſin and puniſhment; beſides the reſpect of *David*'s offence, they die for themſelves.

It was no ordinary peſtilence that was thus ſuddenly and univerſally mortal. Common eyes ſaw the botch,

botch, and the marks, but not the angel: *David*'s clearer ſight hath eſpied him, after that killing peragration through the tribes of *Iſrael*, ſhaking his ſword over *Jeruſalem*, and hovering over mount *Sion*; and now he, who doubtleſs had ſpent thoſe three diſmal days in the ſaddeſt contrition, humbly caſts himſelf down at the feet of the avenger, and lays himſelf ready for the fatal ſtroke of juſtice: it was more terror that God intended in the viſible ſhape of his angel, and deeper humiliation; and what he meant, he wrought. Never ſoul could be more dejected, more anguiſhed with the ſenſe of a judgment, in the bitterneſs whereof he cries out, *Behold, I have ſinned, yea, I have done wickedly; but theſe ſheep, what have they done? Let thine hand, I pray thee, be againſt me, and againſt my father's houſe.* The better any man is, the more ſenſible he is of his own wretchedneſs. Many of thoſe ſheep were wolves to *David*. What had they done? They had done that which was the occaſion of *David*'s ſin, and the cauſe of their own puniſhment: but that gracious penitent knew his own ſin, he knew not theirs; and therefore can ſay, *I have ſinned, what have they done?* It is ſafe accuſing, where we may be boldeſt, and are beſt acquainted ourſelves.

O the admirable charity of *David*, that would have ingroſſed the plague to himſelf, and his houſe, from the reſt of *Iſrael*, and ſues to interpoſe himſelf betwixt his people and the vengeance; he that had put himſelf upon the paws of the bear and lion, for the reſcue of his ſheep, will now caſt himſelf upon the ſword of the angel, for the preſervation of *Iſrael*. There was hope in thoſe conflicts; in this yieldance there could be nothing but death. Thus didſt thou, O Son of *David*, the true and great ſhepherd of thy church, offer thyſelf to death for them who had their hands in thy blood, who both procured thy death,

and deſerved their own. Here he offered himſelf, that had ſinned, for thoſe whom he profeſſed to have not done evil; thou that didſt no ſin, vouchſafeſt to offer thyſelf for us that were all ſin: he offered and eſcaped, thou offeredſt and diedſt; and by thy death we live, and are freed from everlaſting deſtruction.

But, O Father of all mercies, how little pleaſure doſt thou take in the blood of ſinners! It was thine own pity that inhibited the deſtroyer. Ere *David* could ſee the angel, thou hadſt reſtrained him. *It is ſufficient, hold now thy hand.* If thy compaſſion did not both with-hold and abridge thy judgments, what place were there for us out of hell!

How eaſy and juſt had it been for God, to have made the ſhutting up of that third evening red with blood! His goodneſs repents of the ſlaughter, and calls for that ſacrifice wherewith he will be appeaſed. An altar muſt be built in the threſhing-floor of *Araunah* the *Jebuſite:* lo, in that very hill, where the angel held the ſword of *Abraham* from killing his ſon, doth God now hold the ſword of the angel from killing his people! Upon this very ground ſhall the temple after ſtand; here ſhall be the holy altar, which ſhall ſend up the acceptable oblations of God's people in ſucceeding generations.

O God, what was the threſhing-floor of a *Jebuſite* to thee above all other ſoils! what virtue, what merit was in this earth? As in places, ſo in perſons, it is not to be heeded what they are, but what thou wilt; that is worthieſt which thou pleaſeſt to accept.

Rich and bountiful *Araunah* is ready to meet *David* in ſo holy a motion, and munificently offers his *Sion* for the place, his oxen for the ſacrifice, his carts and ploughs, and other utenſils of his husbandry, for the wood. Two frank hearts are well met; *David* would buy, *Araunah* would give: the *Jebuſite* would not ſell, *David* will not take. Since it was for God,

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and to *David*, *Araunah* is loath to bargain; ſince it was for God, *David* wiſheth to pay dear: *I will not offer burnt-offerings to the Lord my God, of that which doth coſt me nothing.* Heroical ſpirits do well become eminent perſons. He, that knew it was better to give than to receive, would not receive, but give; there can be no devotion in a niggardly heart; as unto dainty palates, ſo to the godly ſoul, that taſtes ſweeteſt, that coſts moſt: nothing is dear enough for the Creator of all things. It is an heartleſs piety of thoſe baſe-minded Chriſtians, that care only to ſerve God good-cheap.

BOOK SEVENTEENTH.

CONTEM. I. ADONIJAH *defeated.*

DAVID had not ſo carefully husbanded his years, as to maintain a vigorous age; he was therefore, what through wars, what with ſorrows, what with ſickneſs, decrepit betimes. By that time he was ſeventy years old, his natural heat was ſo waſted, that his clothes could not warm him; how many have we known of more ſtrength, at more age? The holieſt ſoul dwells not in an impregnable fort; if the revenging angel ſpared *David*, yet age and death will not ſpare him; neither his new altar, nor his coſtly ſacrifice can be of force againſt decay of nature: nothing but death can prevent the weakneſſes of age.

None can blame a people, if, when they have a good king, they are deſirous to hold him. *David*'s ſervants and ſubjects have commended unto his bed a fair young virgin; not for the heat of luſt, but of life, that, by this means, they might make an outward ſupply of fewel for that vital fire which was well-near extinguiſhed with age.

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As it is in the market, or the ſtage, ſo it is in our life; one goes out, another comes in: when *David* was withering, *Adonijah* was in his bloſſom; that ſon, as he was next to *Abſalom*, both in the beauty of his body, and the time of his birth, ſo was he too like him in practice; he alſo, taking advantage of his father's infirmity, will be carving himſelf of the kingdom of *Iſrael*; that he might no whit vary from his pattern, he gets him alſo chariots and horſemen, and fifty men to run before him. Theſe two, *Abſalom* and *Adonijah*, were the darlings of their father; their father had not diſpleaſed them from their childhood, therefore they both diſpleaſed him in his age: thoſe children had need to be very gracious, that are not marred with pampering. It is more than God owes us, if we receive comfort in thoſe children whom we have over-loved; the indulgence of parents at laſt pays them home in croſſes.

It is true that *Adonijah* was *David*'s eldeſt ſon now remaining, and therefore might ſeem to challenge the juſteſt title to the crown; but the kingdom of *Iſrael*, in ſo late an erection, had not yet known the right of ſucceſſion. God himſelf, that had ordained the government, was as yet the immediate elector; he fetched *Saul* from amongſt the ſtuff, and *David* from the ſheepfold, and had now appointed *Solomon* from the ferule to the ſceptre.

And if *Adonijah*, which is unlike, had not known this, yet it had been his part to have taken his father with him in this claim of his ſucceſſion; and not ſo to prevent a brother, that he ſhould ſhoulder out a father, and not ſo violently to pre-occupate the throne, that he ſhould rather be a rebel than an heir.

As *Abſalom*, ſo *Adonijah* wants not furtherers in this uſurpation, whether ſpiritual or temporal; *Joab* the general, and *Abiathar* the prieſt, give both counſel and aid to ſo unſeaſonable a challenge; theſe two had

had been firm to *David* in all his troubles, in all inſurrections; yet now, finding him faſtened to the bed of age and death, they ſhew themſelves thus ſlippery in the looſe. Outward happineſs and friendſhip are not known till our laſt act. In the impotency of either our revenge or recompenſe, it will eaſily appear who loved us for ourſelves, who for their own ends.

Had not *Adonijah* known that *Solomon* was deſigned to the kingdom, both by God and *David*, he had never invited all the reſt of the king's ſons, his brethren, and left out *Solomon*, who was otherways the moſt unlikely to have been his rival in this honour; all the reſt were elder than he, and might therefore have had more pretence for their competition. Doubtleſs the court of *Iſrael* could not but know, that, immediately upon the birth of *Solomon*, God ſent him, by *Nathan* the prophet, a name and meſſage of love; neither was it for nothing that God called him *Jedidiah*, and fore-promiſed him the honour of building an houſe to his name; and, in return of ſo glorious a ſervice, the eſtabliſhment of the throne of his kingdom over *Iſrael* for ever; notwithſtanding all which, *Adonijah*, backed by the ſtrength of a *Joab*, and the gravity of an *Abiathar*, will underwork *Solomon*, and juſtle into the not-yet vacant ſeat of his father *David*. Vain men, while like proud, and yet brittle clay, they will be knocking their ſides againſt the ſolid and eternal decree of God, break themſelves in pieces.

I do not find that *Adonijah* ſent any meſſage of threats or unkindneſs to *Zadok* the prieſt, or *Nathan* the prophet, or *Benaiah* the ſon of *Jehoiada*, and the other worthies; only he invited them not to his feaſt with the king's ſons and ſervants: ſometimes a very omiſſion is an affront and a menace. They well knew, that, ſince they were not called as gueſts, they were counted as enemies. Ceremonies of courteſy, though they be in themſelves ſlight and arbitrary, yet the neglect

neglect of them, in some cases, may undergo a dangerous construction.

Nathan was the man by whom God had sent that errand of grace to *David*, concerning *Solomon*, assuring him both to reign and prosper: yet now, when *Adonijah*'s plot was thus on foot, he doth not sit still, and depend upon the issue of God's decree, but he bestirs him in the business, and consults with *Bathsheba*, how at once to save their lives, and to advance *Solomon*, and defeat *Adonijah*: God's predetermination includes the means as well as the end; the same Providence that had ordained a crown to *Solomon*, a repulse to *Adonijah*, preservation to *Bathsheba* and *Nathan*, had fore-appointed the wise and industrious endeavours of the prophet to bring about his just and holy purposes. If we would not have God wanting to us, we must not be wanting to ourselves; even when we know what God hath meant to us, we may not be negligent.

The prophets of God did not look for revelation in all their affairs, in some things they were left to the counsel of their own hearts; the policy of *Nathan* was of use as well as his prophesy: that alone hath turned the stream into the right channel. Nothing could be more wisely contrived than the sending in of *Bathsheba* to *David*, with so seasonable and forcible an expostulation, and the seconding of hers with his own.

Though lust were dead in *David*, yet the respects of his old matrimonial love lived still; the very presence of *Bathsheba* pleaded strongly, but her speech more; the time was, when his affection offended in excess towards her being then another's, he cannot now neglect her, being his own, and if either his age, or the remorse of his old offence should have set him off, yet she knew his oath was sure; *My lord, thou swarest by the Lord thy God unto thine hand-*

hand-maid, ſaying, Aſſuredly Solomon *thy ſon ſhall reign after me, and he ſhall ſit upon my throne;* his word had been firm, but his oath was inviolable; we are engaged if we have promiſed, but, if we have ſworn, we are bound.

Neither heaven nor earth have any gyves for that man that can ſhake off the fetters of an oath; for he cares not for that God whom he dares invoke to a falſhood; and he that cares not for God, will not care for man.

Ere *Bathſheba* can be over the threſhold, *Nathan*, upon compact, is knocking at the door. God's prophet was never but welcome to the bed-chamber of king *David;* in a ſeeming ſtrangeneſs he falls upon the ſame ſuit, upon the ſame complaint with *Bathſheba:* honeſt policies do not miſbecome the holieſt prophets; ſhe might ſeem to ſpeak as a woman, as a mother, out of paſſion; the word of a prophet could not be miſdoubted. He therefore, that had formerly brought to *David* that chiding and bloody meſſage concerning *Bathſheba*, comes now to *David* to ſue for the life and honour of *Bathſheba*, and he, that was ſent from God, to *David*, to bring the news of a gracious promiſe of favour unto *Solomon*, comes now to challenge the execution of it from the hands of a father; and he, whoſe place freed him from ſuſpicion of a faction, complains of the inſolent demeanour and proclamation of *Adonijah;* what he began with an humble obeiſance, ſhutting up in a lowly and loving expoſtulation, *Is this thing done by my lord the king, and thou haſt not ſhewed thy ſervant who ſhould ſit on the throne of my lord the king after him?* As *Nathan* was of God's council unto *David*, ſo was he of *David*'s council both to God and the ſtate. As God therefore, upon all occaſions, told *Nathan* what he meant to do with *David*, ſo had *David* wont to tell *Nathan* what he meant to do in his holy, and moſt

important civil affairs. There are caſes wherein it is not unfit for God's prophets to meddle with matters of ſtate; it is no diſparagement to religious princes to impart their counſels unto them who can requite them with the counſels of God.

That wood which a ſingle iron could not rive, is ſoon ſplitted with a double wedge; the ſeaſonable importunity of *Bathſheba* and *Nathan*, thus ſeconding each other, hath ſo wrought upon *David*, that now his love to *Adonijah* gives place to indignation, nature to an holy fidelity; and now he renews his ancient oath to *Bathſheba* with a paſſionate ſolemnity; *As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my ſoul out of all adverſity, even as I ſware unto thee by the Lord God of* Iſrael, *ſaying, Aſſuredly* Solomon *thy ſon ſhall reign after me, and he ſhall ſit upon my throne in my ſtead; ſo will I certainly do this day.* In the decay of *David*'s body, I find not his intellectual powers any whit impaired: as one therefore that from his bed could, with a perfect, if weak hand, ſteer the government of *Iſrael*, he gives wiſe and full directions for the inauguration of *Solomon: Zadok* the prieſt, and *Nathan* the prophet, and *Benaiah* the captain, receive his grave and princely charge for the carriage of that ſo weighty a buſineſs. They are commanded to take with them the royal guard, to ſet *Solomon* upon his father's mule, to carry him down in ſtate to *Gihon*, to anoint him with the holy oil of the tabernacle, to ſound the trumpets, and proclaim him in the ſtreets, to bring him back with triumph and magnificence to the court, and to ſet him in the royal throne with all the due ceremonies of coronation.

How pleaſing was this command to them, who, in *Solomon*'s glory, ſaw their own ſafety! *Benaiah* applauds it, and not fearing a father's envy, in *David*'s preſence wiſhes *Solomon*'s throne exalted above his; the people are raviſhed with the joy of ſo hopeful a ſucceſſion,

ſucceſſion, and break the earth, and fill the heaven with the noiſe of their muſic and ſhouting.

Solomon's gueſts had now at laſt better cheer than *Adonijah*'s, whoſe feaſt, as all wicked mens, ended in horror; no ſooner are their bellies full of meat, than their ears are full of the ſound of thoſe trumpets which at once proclaim *Solomon*'s triumph, and their confuſion: ever after the meal is ended comes the reckoning. God could as eaſily have prevented this jollity, as marred it; but he willingly ſuffers vain men to pleaſe themſelves for a time in the conceited ſucceſs of their own projects, that afterwards their diſappointment may be ſo much the more grievous. No doubt, at this feaſt there was many an health drunken to *Adonijah*, many a confident boaſt of their proſpering deſign, many a ſcorn of the deſpiſed faction of *Solomon*; and now, for their laſt diſh, is ſerved up aſtoniſhment, and fearful expectation of a juſt revenge. *Jonathan*, the ſon of *Abiathar* the prieſt, brings the news of *Solomon*'s ſolemn and joyful enthronization; now all hearts are cold, all faces pale, and every man hath but life enough to run away. How ſuddenly is this braving troop diſperſed! *Adonijah*, their new prince, flies to the horns of the altar, as diſtruſting all hopes of life, ſave the ſanctity of the place, and the mercy of his rival.

So doth the wiſe and juſt God befool proud and inſolent ſinners, in thoſe ſecret plots wherein they hope to undermine the true Son of *David*, the Prince of Peace; he ſuffers them to lay their heads together, and to feaſt themſelves in a jocund ſecurity, and promiſe of ſucceſs; at laſt, when they are at the height of their joys and hopes, he confounds all their devices, and lays them open to the ſcorn of the world, and to the anguiſh of their own guilty hearts.

CONTEM. II. DAVID'S *end, and* SOLOMON'S *beginning.*

IT well became *Solomon* to begin his reign in peace. *Adonijah* receives pardon upon his good behaviour, and finds the throne of *Solomon* as ſafe as the altar. *David* lives to ſee a wiſe ſon warm in his ſeat; and now he, that yielded to ſucceſſion, yields to nature. Many good counſels had *David* given his heir; now he ſums them up in his end. Dying words are wont to be weightieſt. The ſoul, when it is entering into glory, breathes nothing but divine. *I go the way of all the earth.* How well is that princely heart content to ſubſcribe to the conditions of human mortality! as one that knew ſovereignty doth not reach to the affairs of nature. Though a king, he neither expects, nor deſires an immunity from diſſolution, making no account to go in any other than the common track, to the univerſal home of mankind, the houſe of age. Whither ſhould earth but to earth? and why ſhould we grudge to do that which all do? *Be thou ſtrong therefore, and ſhew thyſelf a man.* Even when his ſpirit was going out, he puts ſpirit into his ſon. Age puts life into youth, and the dying animates the vigorous. He had well found, that ſtrength was requiſite to government, that he had need to be no leſs than a man that ſhould rule over men. If greatneſs ſhould never receive any oppoſition, yet thoſe worlds of cares and buſineſſes that attend the chair of ſtate are able to over-lay any mean powers. A weak man may obey, none but the ſtrong can govern. Graceleſs courage were but the whetſtone of tyranny: *Take heed therefore to the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his ſtatutes.* The beſt legacy that *David* bequeaths to his heir, is the care of piety; himſelf had found the ſweetneſs of a good conſcience, and

now

now he commends it to his ſucceſſor. If there be any thing that, in our deſires of the proſperous condition of our children, takes place of goodneſs, our hearts are not upright. Here was the father of a king, charging the king's ſon to keep the ſtatutes of the King of kings; as one that knew greatneſs could neither exempt from obedience, nor privilege ſin; as one that knew the leaſt deviation in the greateſt and higheſt orb, is both moſt ſenſible, and moſt dangerous. Neither would he have his ſon to look for any proſperity, ſave only from well-doing. That happineſs is built upon ſand or ice, which is raiſed upon any foundation beſides virtue. If *Solomon* was wiſe, *David* was good; and if old *Solomon* had well remembered the counſel of old *David*, he had not ſo foully miſcarried.

After the precepts of piety, follow thoſe of juſtice, diſtributing in a due recompenſe, as revenge to *Joab* and *Shimei*, ſo favour to the houſe of *Barzillai*. The bloodineſs of *Joab* had lain long upon *David*'s heart: the hideous noiſe of thoſe treacherous murders, as it had pierced heaven, ſo it ſtill filled the ears of *David*: he could abhor the villany, though he could not revenge it; what he cannot pay, he will owe, and approve himſelf at laſt a faithful debitor: now he will defray it by the hand of *Solomon*. The ſlaughter was of *Abner* and *Amaſa*: *David* appropriates it; *Thou knoweſt what* Joab *did to me*. The ſovereign is ſmitten in the ſubject; neither is it other than juſt, that the arraignment of mean malefactors runs in the ſtile of wrong to the king's crown and dignity: how much more doſt thou, O ſon of *David*, take to thyſelf thoſe inſolencies which are done to thy pooreſt ſubjects, ſervants, ſons, members here upon earth! No *Saul* can touch a chriſtian here below, but thou feeleſt it in heaven, and complaineſt.

But,

But, what ſhall we think of this? *David* was a man of war, *Solomon* a king of peace; yet *David* refers this revenge to *Solomon*. How juſt it was, that he who ſhed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that was about his loins, ſhould have his blood ſhed in peace, by a prince of peace? Peace is fitteſt to rectify the outrages of war: or whether is not this done in type of that divine adminiſtration, wherein thou, O Father of Heaven, haſt committed all judgment unto thine eternal Son? Thou, who couldſt immediately either plague, or abſolve ſinners, wilt do neither, but by the hand of a Mediator.

Solomon learned betimes what his ripeneſs taught afterwards, *Take away the wicked from the king, and his throne ſhall be eſtabliſhed in righteouſneſs.* Cruel *Joab* and malicious *Shimei* muſt be therefore upon the firſt opportunity removed; the one lay open to preſent juſtice, for abetting the conſpiracy of *Adonijah*, neither needs the help of time for a new advantage; the other went under the protection of an oath from *David*, and therefore muſt be fetched in upon a new challenge. The hoary head of both muſt be brought to the grave with blood, elſe *David*'s head could not be brought to his grave in peace. Due puniſhment of malefactors is the debt of authority: if that holy king has run into arrearages, yet, as one that hates and fears to break the bank, he gives order to his pay-maſter, it ſhall be defrayed, if not by him, yet for him.

Generous natures cannot be unthankful. *Barzillai* had ſhewed *David* ſome kindneſs in his extremity; and now the good man will have poſterity to inherit the thanks. How much more bountiful is the Father of mercies, in the remuneration of our poor unworthy ſervices! Even ſucceſſions of generations ſhall fare the better for one good parent.

The

The dying words and thoughts of the man after God's own heart did not confine themſelves to the ſtraits of theſe particular charges, but enlarged themſelves to the care of God's public ſervice. As good men are beſt at laſt, *David* did never ſo buſily and carefully marſhal the affairs of God, as when he was fixed to the bed of his age and death. Then did he load his ſon *Solomon* with the charge of building the houſe of God; then did he lay before the eyes of his ſon the model and pattern of that whole ſacred work, whereof if *Solomon* bear the name, yet *David* no leſs merits it. He now gives the platform of the courts and buildings: he gives the gold and ſilver for that holy uſe, an hundred thouſand talents of gold, a thouſand thouſand talents of ſilver, beſides braſs and iron paſſing weight: he weighs out thoſe precious metals for their ſeveral deſignments; every future veſſel is laid out already in his poiſe, if not in his form. He excites the princes of *Iſrael* to their aſſiſtance, in ſo high a work: he takes notice of their bountiful offerings: he numbers up the *Levites* for the public ſervice, and ſets them their taſks. He appoints the ſingers, and other muſicians to their ſtations; the porters to the gates that ſhould be; and now, when he hath ſet all things in a deſired order and forwardneſs, he ſhuts up with a zealous bleſſing of his *Solomon*, and his people, and ſleeps with his fathers. O bleſſed ſoul, how quiet a poſſeſſion haſt thou now taken, after ſo many tumults, of a better crown! Thou that haſt prepared all things for the houſe of thy God, how happily art thou now welcomed to that houſe of his, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens! Who now ſhall envy unto good princes the honour of overſeeing the buſineſſes of God and his church, when *David* was thus punctual in theſe divine proviſions? What fear can be of uſurpation, where they have ſo glorious a precedent?

Now

Now is *Solomon* the ſecond time crowned king of *Iſrael*, and now in his own right, as formerly in his father's, ſits peaceably upon the throne of the Lord: his awe and power come on faſter than his years. Envy and ambition, where it is once kindled, may ſooner be hid in the aſhes than quite put out. *Adonijah*, yet hangs after his old hopes, he remembers how ſweet he found the name of a king; and now hath laid a new plot for the ſetting up of his cracked title: he would make the bed a ſtep to the throne; his old complices are ſure enough; his part would gather much ſtrength, if he might enjoy *Abiſhag*, the relict of his father, to wife. If it were not the *Jewiſh* faſhion, as is pretended, that a king's widow ſhould marry none but a king; yet certainly the power both of the alliance, and friendſhip of a queen, muſt needs not a little advance his purpoſe. The crafty rival dare not either move the ſuit to *Solomon*, or effect the marriage without him; but would cunningly undermine the ſon by the ſuit of that mother, whoſe ſuit had undermined him. The weaker veſſels are commonly uſed in the moſt dangerous ſuggeſtions of evil.

Bathſheba was ſo wiſe a woman, that ſome of her counſels are canonized for divine; yet ſhe ſaw not the depth of this drift of *Adonijah;* wherefore ſhe both entertains the ſuit, and moves it. But whatever were the intent of the ſuitor, could ſhe chuſe but ſee the unlawfulneſs of ſo inceſtuous a match? It is not long ſince ſhe ſaw her late huſband *David* abominating the bed of thoſe his concubines that had been touched by his ſon *Abſalom;* and can ſhe hold it lawful, that his ſon *Adonijah* ſhould climb up to the bed of his father's wife? Sometimes even the beſt eyes are dim, and diſcern not thoſe things which are obvious to weaker ſights: or whether did not *Bathſheba* well ſee the foulneſs of the ſuit; and yet in compaſſion of *Adonijah*'s late repulſe, wherein ſhe was the chief agent,

gent, and, in a deſire to make him amends for the loſs of the kingdom, ſhe yields even thus to gratify him. It is an injurious weakneſs to be drawn, upon any by-reſpects, to the furtherance of faulty ſuits of unlawful actions.

No ſooner doth *Bathſheba* come in place, than *Solomon* her ſon riſes from his chair of ſtate, and meets her, and bows to her, and ſets her on his right hand, as not ſo remembering himſelf to be a king, that he ſhould forget he was a ſon. No outward dignity can take away the rights and obligations of nature. Had *Bathſheba* been as mean as *Solomon* was mighty, ſhe had carried away this honour from a gracious ſon: yet, for all theſe due compliments, *Bathſheba* goes away with a denial: reverence ſhe ſhall have, ſhe ſhall not have a condeſcent.

In the acts of magiſtracy, all regards of natural relations muſt give way. That which ſhe propounded as a ſmall requeſt, is now, after a general and confuſed engagement, rejected as unreaſonable. It were pity we ſhould be heard in all our ſuits. *Bathſheba* makes a petition againſt herſelf, and knows it not: her ſafety and life depend upon *Solomon*'s reign, yet ſhe unwittingly moves for the advancement of *Adonijah*.

Solomon was too dutiful to check his mother, and too wiſe to yield to her. In unfit ſupplications, we are moſt heard when we are repelled. Thus doth our God many times anſwer our prayers with merciful denials; and moſt bleſſeth us in croſſing our deſires.

Wiſe *Solomon* doth not find himſelf perplexed with the ſcruple of his promiſe; he that had ſaid, *Aſk on, for I will not ſay thee nay*, can now ſwear, *God do ſo to me, and more alſo, if* Adonijah *hath not ſpoken this word againſt his own life*. His promiſe was according to his ſuppoſition; his ſuppoſition was of no other than of a ſuit, honeſt, reaſonable, expedient;

now he holds himſelf free from that grant, wherein there was at once both ſin and danger. No man can be intangled with general words, againſt his own juſt and honeſt intentions.

The policies of wicked men befool them at laſt: this interceſſion hath undone *Adonijah*, and, inſtead of the throne, haſtens his grave. The ſword of *Benaiah* puts an end to that dangerous rivality. *Joab* and *Abiathar* ſtill held champerty with *Adonijah*; their hand was both in the claim of his kingdom, and in the ſuit of *Abiſhag*. There are crimes wherein there are no acceſſories; ſuch is this of treaſon. *Abiathar* may thank his burden that he lives: had he not born the ark of the Lord before *David*, he had not now carried his head upon his ſhoulders; had he not been afflicted with *David*, he had periſhed with *Adonijah*: now though he were, in his own merit, a man of death, yet he ſhall ſurvive his partners, *Get thee to* Anathoth *unto thine own fields*. The prieſthood of *Abiathar*, as it aggravated his crime, ſo it ſhall preſerve his life. Such honour have good princes given to the miniſters of the ſanctuary, that their very coat hath been defence enough againſt the ſword of juſtice; how much more ſhould it be of proof againſt the contempt of baſe perſons!

Beſides his function, reſpect is had to his ſufferings: the father and brethren of *Abiathar* were ſlain for *David*'s ſake, therefore for *David*'s ſake *Abiathar*, though worthy of death, ſhall live: he had been now a dead man, if he had not been formerly afflicted. Thus doth our good God deal with us; by the rod he prevents the ſword, and therefore will not condemn us for our ſins, becauſe we have ſuffered. If *Abiathar* do not forfeit his life, yet his office he ſhall; he muſt change *Jeruſalem* for *Anathoth*, and the prieſthood for a retired privacy. It was fourſcore years ago ſince the ſentence of judgment was denounced againſt

gainſt the houſe of *Eli;* now doth it come to execution. This juſt quarrel againſt *Abiathar*, the laſt of that line, ſhall make good the threatened judgment. The wickedneſs of *Eli*'s houſe was neither purged by ſacrifice, nor obliterated by time. If God pay ſlowly, yet he pays ſure. Delay of moſt certain puniſhment, is neither any hinderance to his juſtice, nor any comfort to our miſeries.

CONTEM. III. *The execution of* JOAB *and* SHIMEI.

ABIATHAR ſhall live, though he ſerve not. It is in the power of princes to remit, at leaſt, thoſe puniſhments which attend the breach of human laws; good reaſon they ſhould have power to diſpenſe with the wrongs done to their own perſons. The news of *Adonijah*'s death, and *Abiathar*'s removal cannot but affright *Joab*, who now runs to *Gibeon*, and takes ſanctuary in the tabernacle of God; all his hope of defence is in the horns of the altar. Fond *Joab*, hadſt thou formerly ſought for counſel from the tabernacle, thou hadſt not now needed to ſeek to it for refuge; if thy devotions had not been wanting to that altar, thou hadſt not needed it for a ſhelter. It is the faſhion of our fooliſh preſumption to look for protection where we have not cared to yield obedience.

Even a *Joab* clings faſt to God's altar in his extremity, which in his proſperity he regarded not. The worſt men would be glad to make uſe of God's ordinances for their advantage. Neceſſity will drive the moſt profane and lawleſs man to God: but what do theſe bloody hands touching the holy altar of God? Miſerable *Joab*, what help canſt thou expect from that ſacred pile? Thoſe horns, that were beſprinkled with the blood of beaſts, abhor to be touched by the blood of men; that altar was for the expiation of ſin by

blood, not for the protection of the ſin of blood. If *Adonijah* fled thither and eſcaped, it is murder that purſues thee more than conſpiracy. God hath no ſanctuary for a wilful homicide.

Yet ſuch reſpect doth *Benaiah* give to that holy place, that his ſword is unwilling to touch him that touches the altar. Thoſe horns ſhall put off death for the time, and give protraction of the execution, though not preſervation of life. How ſweet is life, even to thoſe who have been prodigal of the blood of others, that *Joab* ſhifts thus to hold it but ſome few hours! *Benaiah* returns with *Joab*'s anſwer, inſtead of his head, *Nay, but I will die here;* as not daring to unſheath his ſword againſt a man ſheltered in God's tabernacle, without a new commiſſion. Young *Solomon* is ſo well acquainted with the law of God, in ſuch a caſe, that he ſticks not at the ſentence: he knew that God had enacted, *If a man come preſumptuouſly upon his neighbour to ſlay him with guile, thou ſhalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.* He knew *Joab*'s murders had not been more preſumptuous than guileful; and therefore he ſends *Benaiah* to take away the offender, both from God and men, from the altar and the world.

No ſubject had merited more than *Joab*. When proclamation was made in *Iſrael*, that whoever ſhould ſmite the *Jebuſites* firſt, he ſhould be the chief and captain, *Joab* was the man: when *David* built ſome part of *Jeruſalem*, *Joab* built the reſt; ſo that *Jeruſalem* owes itſelf to *Joab*, both for recovery and reparation. No man held ſo cloſe to *David;* no man was more intent to the weal of *Iſrael;* none ſo ſucceſsful in victories; yet now is he called to reckon for his old ſins, and muſt repay blood to *Amaſa* and *Abner*. It is not in the power of all our deſerts to buy off one ſin, either with God or man: where life is ſo deeply forfeited, it admits of no redemption.

The

The honeſt ſimplicity of thoſe times knew not of any infamy in the execution of juſtice. *Benaiah*, who was the great marſhal under *Solomon*, thinks not his fingers defiled with that fatal ſtroke. It is a fooliſh niceneſs to put more ſhame in the doing of juſtice, than in the violating of it.

In one act *Solomon* hath approved himſelf both a good magiſtrate and a good ſon, fulfilling at once the will of a father and the charge of God; concluding upon this juſt execution, that, *Upon* David, *and upon his ſeed, and upon his houſe, and upon his throne, there ſhall be peace for ever from the Lord;* and inferring, that without this there could have been no peace.

Blood is a reſtleſs ſuitor, and will not leave clamouring for judgment, till the mouth be ſtopped with revenge. In this caſe favour to the offender is cruelty to the favourer.

Now hath *Joab* paid all his arrearages by the ſword of *Benaiah;* there is no ſuit againſt his corps, that hath the honour of a burial fit for a peer of *Iſrael*, for the near couſin to the king. Death puts an end to all quarrels: *Solomon* ſtrikes off the ſcore when God is ſatisfied; the revenge that ſurvives death, and will not be ſhut up in the coffin, is barbarous, and unbeſeeming the true *Iſraelites*.

Only *Shimei* remains upon the file; his courſe is next, yet ſo, as that it ſhall be in his own liberty to haſten his end. Upon *David*'s remiſſion, *Shimei* dwells ſecurely in *Bahurim*, a town of the tribe of *Benjamin;* doubtleſs, when he ſaw ſo round juſtice done upon *Adonijah* and *Joab*, his guilty heart could not think *Solomon*'s meſſage portended ought but his execution; and now he cannot but be well pleaſed with ſo eaſy conditions of dwelling at *Jeruſalem*, and not paſſing over the brook *Kidron;* what more delightful place could he chuſe to live in than that city.

city, which was the glory of the whole earth! What more pleaſing bounds could he wiſh than the ſweet banks of *Kidron! Jeruſalem* could be no priſon to him, while it was a paradiſe to his betters; and, if he had a deſire to take freſh air, he had the ſpace of ſix furlongs to walk from the city to the brook; he could not complain to be ſo delectably confined; and beſides, thrice every year, he might be ſure to ſee all his friends, without ſtirring his foot.

Wiſe *Solomon*, while he cared to ſeem not too ſevere an exactor of that which his father had remitted, prudently lays inſenſible twigs for ſo foul an offender; beſides the old grudge, no doubt, *Solomon* ſaw cauſe to ſuſpect the fidelity of *Shimei*, as a man who was ever known to be hollow to the houſe of *David;* the obſcurity of a country life would eaſily afford him more ſafe opportunities of ſecret miſchief; many eyes ſhall watch him in the city, he cannot look out unſeen, he cannot whiſper unheard; upon no other terms ſhall he enjoy his life, which the leaſt ſtraying ſhall forfeit.

Shimei feels no pain in this reſtraint; how many nobles of *Iſrael* do that for pleaſure, which he doth upon command? Three years hath he lived within compaſs, limited both by *Solomon*'s charge and his own oath; it was ſtill in his power, notwithſtanding *David*'s caveat, to have laid down his hoary head in the grave, without blood; the juſt God infatuates thoſe whom he means to plague. Two of *Shimei*'s ſervants are fled to *Gath;* and now he ſaddles his aſs, and is gone to fetch them back: either he thinks this word of *Solomon* is forgotten, or, in the multitude of greater affairs, not heeded, or this ſo ſmall an occurrence will not come to his ears. Covetouſneſs, and preſumption of impunity, are the deſtruction of many a ſoul; *Shimei* ſeeks his ſervants, and loſes himſelf. How many are there who cry out of this folly,

and

and yet imitate it; theſe earthly things either are our ſervants, or ſhould be; how commonly do we ſee men run out of the bounds, ſet by God's law, to hunt after them, till their ſouls incur a fearful judgment?

Princes have thouſands of eyes and ears; if *Shimei* will for more ſecrecy ſaddle his own aſs, and take, as is like, the benefit of night for his paſſage, his journey cannot be hid from *Solomon*. How wary had thoſe men need to be which are obnoxious? Without delay is *Shimei* complained of, convented, charged with violation both of the oath of God, and the injunction of *Solomon;* and that all theſe might appear to be but an occaſion of that puniſhment, whoſe cauſe was more remote; now is all that old venom laid before him, which his malice had long ſince ſpit at God's anointed. *Thou knoweſt all the wickedneſs whereto thine heart is privy, that thou didſt to* David *my father*.

Had this old tally been ſtricken off, yet could not *Shimei* have pleaded ought for his life; for had he ſaid, Let not my lord the king be thus mortally diſpleaſed for ſo ſmall an offence; who ever died for paſſing over *Kidron?* what man is the worſe for my harmleſs journey? It had ſoon been returned, If the act be ſmall, yet the circumſtances are deadly; the commands of ſovereign authority make the ſlighteſt duties weighty; if the journey be harmleſs, yet not the diſobedience; it is not for ſubjects to poiſe the prince's charge in the ſcales of their weak conſtructions, but they muſt ſuppoſe it ever to be of ſuch importance as is pretended by the commander. Beſides the precept, here was a mutual adjuration; *Shimei* ſwore not to go; *Solomon* ſwore his death, if he went; the one oath muſt be revenged, the other muſt be kept: if *Shimei* were falſe in offending, *Solomon* will be juſt in puniſhing. Now therefore, that which

Abiſhai,

Abiſhai, the ſon of *Zeruiah*, wiſhed to have done in the greenneſs of the wound, and was repelled; after long feſtering, *Benaiah* is commanded to do. The ſtones that *Shimei* threw at *David*, ſtruck not ſo deep as *Benaiah*'s ſword; the tongue that curſed the Lord's anointed hath paid the head to boot. Vengeance againſt rebels may ſleep, it cannot die; a ſure tho' late judgment attends thoſe that dare lift up either their hand or tongue againſt the ſacred perſons of God's vicegerents. How much leſs will the God of heaven ſuffer unrevenged the inſolencies and blaſphemies againſt his own divine Majeſty! It is a fearful word, He ſhould not be juſt, if he ſhould hold theſe guiltleſs.

CONTEM. IV. SOLOMON'S *choice, with his judgment upon the two harlots.*

AFTER ſo many meſſages and proofs of grace, *Solomon* begins doubtfully, both for his match, and for his devotion. If *Pharaoh*'s daughter were not a proſelyte, his early choice was beſides unwarrantable, dangerous. The high places not only ſtood, but were frequented, both by the people and king: I do not find *David* climbing up thoſe miſhallowed hills, in an affection of the variety of altars; *Solomon* doth ſo, and yet loves the Lord, and is loved of God again. Such is the mercy of our God, that he will not ſuffer our well-meant weakneſſes to bereave us of his favours: he rather pities than plagues us for the infirmities of upright hearts.

Gibeon was well worthy to be the chief, yea the only high place; there was the allowed altar of God, there was the tabernacle, though, as then, ſevered from the ark; thither did young *Solomon* go up; and, as deſiring to begin his reign with God, there he offers no leſs than a thouſand ſacrifices.

Solomon

Solomon worſhips God by day; God appears to *Solomon* by night. Well may we look to enjoy God, when we have ſerved him; the night cannot but be happy, whoſe day hath been holy.

It was no unuſual courſe with God, to reveal himſelf unto his ſervants by dreams; ſo did he here to *Solomon*, who ſaw more with his eyes ſhut, than ever they could ſee open, even him that was inviſible. The good king had offered unto God a thouſand burnt-ſacrifices, and now God offereth him his option, *Aſk what I ſhall give thee.* He, whoſe the beaſts are on a thouſand mountains, graciouſly accepts a ſmall return of his own. It ſtands not with the munificence of a bountiful God to be indebted to his creature; we cannot give him ought unrecompenſed; there is no way wherein we can be ſo liberal to ourſelves, as by giving to the Poſſeſſor of all things. And art thou ſtill, O God, leſs free unto us, thy meaner ſervants under the goſpel! Haſt thou not ſaid, *Whatſoever ye ſhall aſk the Father in my name, it ſhall be given you?* Only give us grace not to be wanting unto thee, and we know thou canſt not ſuffer any thing to be wanting unto us.

The night follows the temper of the day; and the heart ſo uſeth to ſleep as it wakes. Had not the thoughts of *Solomon* been intent upon wiſdom by day, he had not made it his ſuit in his dream: there needs no leiſure of deliberation; the heart was ſo fore-ſtalled with the love and admiration of wiſdom, that, not abiding the leaſt motion of a competition, it faſtens on that grace it had longed for; *Give unto thy ſervant an underſtanding heart to judge thy people.* Had not *Solomon* been wiſe before, he had not known the worth of wiſdom, he had not preferred it in his deſires. The dung-hill cocks of the world cannot know the price of this pearl; thoſe that have it, know that all other excellencies are but

traſh and rubbiſh unto it. *Solomon* was a great king, and ſaw that he had power enough; but withal he found that royalty, without wiſdom, was no other than eminent diſhonour: there is no trade of life whereto there belongs not a peculiar wiſdom, without which there is nothing but a tedious unprofitableneſs; much more to the higheſt and buſieſt vocation, the regiment of men. As God hath no reaſon to give his beſt favours unaſked, ſo hath he no will to withhold them where they are aſked.

He, that in his cradle had the title of *Beloved of God*, is now beloved more in the throne for the love and deſire of wiſdom; this ſoil could never have born this fruit alone; *Solomon* could not ſo much as have dreamed of wiſdom, if God had not put it into him: and now God takes the ſuit ſo well, as if he were beholden to his creature for wiſhing the beſt to itſelf; and becauſe *Solomon* hath aſked what he ſhould, he ſhall now receive both what he aſked, and what he aſked not; riches and honour ſhall be given him into the match. So doth God love a good choice, that he recompenſes it with overgiving. *Could we but firſt ſeek the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs, all theſe earthly things ſhould be ſuperadded to us.* Had *Solomon* made wealth his boon, he had failed both of riches and wiſdom; now he aſks the beſt, and ſpeeds of all. They are in a fair way of happineſs that can pray well. It was no diſcomfort to *Solomon*, that he awaked and found it a dream; for he knew this dream was divine and oracular; and he already found, in his firſt waking, the real performance of what was promiſed him ſleeping: ſuch illumination did he ſenſibly find in all the rooms of his heart, as if God had now given him a new ſoul. No marvel if *Solomon*, now returning from the tabernacle to the ark, teſtified his joy and thankfulneſs by burnt-offerings, and peace-offerings, and public feaſtings; the heart that hath found

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in itſelf the lively teſtimonies of God's preſence and favour, cannot contain itſelf from outward expreſſions.

God likes not to have his gifts ly dead where he hath conferred them; *Iſrael* ſhall ſoon witneſs, that they have a king enlightened from heaven, in whom wiſdom did not ſtay for heirs, did not admit of any parallel in his predeceſſors; the all-wiſe God will find occaſions to draw forth thoſe graces to uſe and light which he hath beſtowed on man. Two harlots come before young *Solomon* with a difficult plea; it is not like the prince's ear was the firſt that heard this complaint; there was a ſubordinate courſe of juſtice, for the determination of theſe meaner incidences: the hardneſs of this deciſion brought the matter, through all the benches of inferior judicature, to the tribunal of *Solomon*. The very *Iſraelitiſh* harlots were not ſo unnatural, as ſome now-a-days that counterfeit honeſty; theſe ſtrive for the fruit of their womb, ours to put them off; one ſon is yet alive, two mothers contend for him. The children were alike for features, for age; the mothers were alike for reputation; here can be no evidence from others eyes, whether's now is the living child, and whether's is the dead. Had *Solomon* gone about to wring forth the truth by tortures, he had perhaps plagued the innocent, and added pain to the miſery of her loſs; the weaker had been guilty, and the more able to bear had carried away both the child and the victory. The countenance of either of the mothers bewrayed an equality of paſſion; ſorrow poſſeſſed the one for the ſon ſhe had loſt, and the other for the ſon ſhe was in danger to loſe: both were equally peremptory, and importunate in their claim. It is in vain to think that the true part can be diſcerned by the vehemence of their challenge; falſhood is oft-times more clamorous than truth; no witneſſes can be produced; they two dwelt apart under one roof; and if ſome

neighbours have ſeen the children at their birth, and circumciſion, yet how little difference, how much change is there in the favour of infants? How doth death alter more confirmed lines?

The impoſſibility of proof makes the guilty more confident, more impudent; the true mother pleads that her child was taken away at midnight by the other; but in her ſleep, ſhe ſaw it not, ſhe felt it not; and if all her ſenſes could have witneſſed it, yet here was but the affirmation of the one, againſt the denial of the other, which, in perſons alike credible, do but counterpoiſe. What is there now to lead the judge, ſince there is nothing either in the act, or circumſtances, or perſons, or plea, or evidence that might ſway the ſentence? *Solomon* well ſaw, that, when all outward proofs failed, there was an inward affection, which, if it could be fetcht out, would certainly bewray the true mother; he knew ſorrow might more eaſily be diſſembled than natural love: both ſorrowed for their own; both could not love one as theirs. To draw forth then this true proof of motherhood, *Solomon* calls for a ſword. Doubtleſs, ſome of the wiſer hearers ſmiled upon each other, and thought in themſelves, What, will the young king cut theſe knotty cauſes in pieces? will he divide juſtice with edge tools? will he ſmite at hazard before conviction? The actions of wiſe princes are riddles to vulgar conſtructions; neither is it for the ſhallow capacities of the multitude to fathom the deep projects of ſovereign authority: that ſword which had ſerved for execution, ſhall now ſerve for trial; *Divide ye the living child in twain, and give the one half to the one, and the other half to the other*; Oh divine oracle of juſtice, commanding that which it would not have done, that it might find out that which could not be diſcovered; neither God nor his deputies may be ſo taken at their words, as if they always

always intended their commands for action, and not ſometimes for probation.

This ſword hath already pierced the breaſt of the true mother, and divided her heart with fear and grief, at ſo killing a ſentence; there needs no other rack to diſcover nature; and now ſhe thinks, Wo is me that came for juſtice, and am anſwered with cruelty; *Divide ye the living child!* Alas, what hath that poor infant offended, that it ſurvives and is ſued for! How much leſs miſerable had I been, that my child had been ſmothered in my ſleep, than mangled before mine eyes! If a dead carcaſe could have ſatisfied me, I needed not to have complained; what a woful condition am I fallen into, who am accuſed to have been the death of my ſuppoſed child already, and now ſhall be the death of my own! If there were no loſs of my child, yet how can I endure this torment of mine own bowels! how can I live to ſee this part of myſelf ſprawling under that bloody ſword! And while ſhe thinks thus, ſhe ſues to that ſuſpected mercy of her juſt judge, *Oh my lord, give her the living child, and ſlay him not:* as thinking, if he live, he ſhall but change a mother; if he die, his mother loſeth a ſon: while he lives, it ſhall be my comfort that I have a ſon, though I may not call him ſo; dying, he periſheth to both; it is better he ſhould live to a wrong mother, than to neither. Contrarily, her envious competitor, as holding herſelf well ſatisfied that her neighbour ſhould be as childleſs as herſelf, can ſay, *Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it.* Well might *Solomon*, and every hearer conclude, that either ſhe was no mother, or a monſter, that could be content with the murder of her child, and that if ſhe could have been the true mother, and yet have deſired the blood of her infant, ſhe had been as worthy to have been ſtript of her child for ſo foul unnaturalneſs, as the other had been worthy to enjoy him for her

honeſt compaſſion. Not more juſtly than wiſely therefore doth *Solomon* trace the true mother by the footſteps of love, and pity; and adjudgeth the child to thoſe bowels that had yearned at his danger.

Even in morality it is thus alſo; truth as it is one, ſo it loves intireneſs; falſhood, diviſion. Satan, that hath no right to the heart, would be content with a piece of it; God, that made it all, will have either the whole or none. The erroneous church ſtrives with the true, for the living child of ſaving doctrine; each claims it for her own: hereſy, conſcious of her own injuſtice, would be content to go away with a leg, or an arm of ſound principles, as hoping to make up the reſt with her own mixtures: truth cannot abide to part with a joint, and will rather endure to loſe all by violence, than a piece through a willing connivency.

CONTEM. V. *The* TEMPLE.

IT is a weak and injurious cenſure that taxeth *Solomon*'s ſlackneſs in founding the houſe of God; great bodies muſt have but ſlow motions: he was wiſe that ſaid, The matters muſt all be prepared without, ere we build within; and if *David* have laid ready a great part of the metals and timber, yet many a tree muſt be felled and ſquared, and many a ſtone hewn and poliſhed, ere this foundation could be laid: neither could thoſe large cedars be cut, ſawn, ſeaſoned in one year; four years are ſoon gone in ſo vaſt a preparation. *David* had not been ſo intire a friend to *Hiram*, if *Hiram* had not been a friend to God; *Solomon*'s wiſdom had taught him to make uſe of ſo good a neighbour, of a father's friend; he knew that the *Tyrians* ſkill was not given them for nothing; not *Jews* only, but *Gentiles* muſt have their hand in building the temple of God; only *Jews* meddled with the tabernacle, but the temple is not built without the aid

aid of *Gentiles;* they, together with us, make up the church of God.

Even Pagans have their arts from heaven; how juſtly may we improve their graces to the ſervice of the God of heaven; if there be a *Tyrian* that can work more curiouſly in gold, in ſilver, in braſs, in iron, in purple, and blue ſilk, than an *Iſraelite*, why ſhould not he be employed about the temple? Their heatheniſm is their own, their ſkill is their makers: many a one works for the church of God, that yet hath no part in it.

Solomon raiſes a tribute for the work, not of money, but of men: thirty thouſand *Iſraelites* are levied for the ſervice; yet not continuedly, but with intermiſſion, their labour is more generous, and leſs preſſing: it is enough if they keep their courſes one month in *Lebanon*, two at home; ſo as ever ten thouſand work, while twenty thouſand breathe. So favourable is God to his creature, that he requires us not to be over-toiled in the works of his own ſervice. Due reſpirations are requiſite in the holieſt acts. The main ſtreſs of the work lies upon proſelytes; whoſe both number and pains was herein more than the natives: an hundred and fifty thouſand of them are employed in bearing burdens, in hewing ſtones; beſides their three thouſand three hundred overſeers. Now were the deſpiſed *Gibeonites* of good uſe, and in vain doth *Iſrael* wiſh that the zeal of *Saul* had not robbed them of ſo ſerviceable drudges.

There is no man ſo mean but may be ſome way uſeful to the houſe of God. Thoſe that cannot work in gold, and ſilver, and ſilk, yet may cut and hew; and thoſe that can do neither, yet may carry burdens. Even the ſervices that are more homely, are not leſs neceſſary. Who can diſ-hearten himſelf in the conſcience of his own inſufficiency, when he ſees God can as well ſerve himſelf of his labour, as of his ſkill.

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The temple is framed in *Lebanon*, and ſet upon *Sion:* neither hammer nor ax was heard in that holy ſtructure; there was nothing but noiſe in *Lebanon*, nothing in *Sion* but ſilence and peace. Whatever tumults are abroad, it is fit there ſhould be all quietneſs and ſweet concord in the church. O God, that the axes of ſchiſm, or the hammers of furious contentions, ſhould be heard within thy ſanctuary! Thine houſe is not built with blows, with blows it is beaten down. Oh knit the hearts of thy ſervants together in the unity of the ſpirit, and the bond of peace, that we may mind and ſpeak the ſame things; that thou, who art the God of peace, mayſt take pleaſure to dwell under the quiet roof of our hearts!

Now is the foundation laid, and the walls riſing, of that glorious fabric, which all nations admired, and all times have celebrated; even thoſe ſtones which were laid in the baſe of the building were not ragged and rude, but hewn and coſtly: the part that lies covered with earth from the eyes of all beholders, is no leſs precious, than thoſe that are more conſpicuous. God is not all for the eye, he pleaſeth himſelf with the hidden value of the living ſtones of his ſpiritual temple. How many noble graces of his ſervants have been buried by obſcurity; not diſcerned ſo much as by their own eyes? which yet as he gave, ſo he crowneth. Hypocrites regard nothing but ſhew; God, nothing but truth.

The matter of ſo goodly a frame ſtrives with the proportion, whether ſhall more excel: here was nothing but white marble without, nothing but cedar and gold within. Upon the hill of *Sion* ſtands that glittering and ſnowy pile, which both inviteth and dazzleth the eyes of paſſengers afar off; ſo much more precious within, as cedar is better than ſtone, gold than cedar. No baſe thing goes to the making up of God's houſe. If Satan may have a dwelling, he cares

not though he patch it up of the rubbiſh of ſtone, or rotten ſticks, or droſs of metals: God will admit of nothing that is not pure and exquiſite; his church conſiſts of none but the faithful, his habitation is in no heart but the gracious.

The faſhion was no other than that of the tabernacle; only this was more coſtly, more large, more fixed; God was the ſame that dwelt in both; he varied not; the ſame myſtery was in both; only it was fit there ſhould be a proportion betwixt the work and the builder. The tabernacle was erected in a popular eſtate, the temple in a monarchy; it was fit this ſhould ſavour of the munificence of a king, as that of the zeal of a multitude: that was erected in the flitting condition of *Iſrael* in the deſart; this, in their ſettled reſidence in the promiſed land: it was fit therefore that ſhould be framed for motion, this for reſt. Both of them were diſtinguiſhed into three remarkable diviſions, whereof each was more noble, more reſerved than other.

But what do we bend our eyes upon, ſtone, wood, and metals! God would never have taken pleaſure in theſe dead materials for their own ſakes, if they had not had a further intendment: methinks I ſee four temples in this one. It is but one in matter, as the God that dwells in it is but one; three yet more in reſemblance, according to the diviſion of them in whom it pleaſes God to inhabit; for wherever God dwells, there is his temple. O God, thou vouchſafeſt to dwell in the believing heart. As we thy ſilly creatures have our being in thee, ſo thou, the Creator of heaven and earth, haſt thy dwelling in us. The heaven of heavens is not able to contain thee, and yet thou diſdaineſt not to dwell in the ſtrait lodgings of our renewed ſouls. So then, becauſe God's children are many, and thoſe many divided in reſpect of themſelves, though united in their head, therefore this temple, which is but one in collection, as God is

one, is manifold in the diſtribution, as the ſaints are many; each man bearing about him a little ſhrine of this Infinite Majeſty: and for that the moſt general diviſion of the ſaints is in their place and eſtate, ſome ſtruggling and toiling in this earthly warfare, others triumphing in heavenly glory; therefore hath God two other, more univerſal temples; one the church of his ſaints on earth; the other, the higheſt heaven of his ſaints glorified. In all theſe, O God, thou dwelleſt for ever: and this material houſe of thine is a clear repreſentation of theſe three ſpiritual; elſe what were a temple made with hands unto the God of ſpirits? And though one of theſe was a true type of all, yet how are they all exceeded each by other? This of ſtone, though moſt rich and coſtly, yet what is it to the living temple of the Holy Ghoſt, which is our body? What is the temple of this body of ours, to the temple of Chriſt's body, which is his church? And what is the temple of God's church on earth, to that which triumpheth glorioufly in heaven?

How eaſily do we ſee all theſe in this one viſible temple; which, as it had three diſtinctions of rooms, the porch, the holy place, the holy of holies, ſo is each of them anſwered ſpiritually: in the porch we find the regenerate ſoul entering into the bleſſed ſociety of the church; in the holy place, the communion of the true viſible church on earth, ſelected from the world; in the holy of holies, whereinto the high prieſt entered once a year, the glorious heaven, into which our true High Prieſt, Chriſt Jeſus, entered once for all, to make an atonement betwixt God and man. In all theſe what a meet correſpondence there is, in proportion, matter, ſituation!

In proportion; the ſame rule that ſkilful carvers obſerve in the cutting out of the perfect ſtatue of a man, that the height be thrice the breadth, and the breadth one third of the height, was likeways duly obſerved

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in the fabric of the temple, whoſe length was double to the height, and treble to the breadth, as being ſixty cubits long, thirty high, and twenty broad. How exquiſite a ſymmetry haſt thou ordained, O God, betwixt the faithful heart, and thy church on earth, with that in heaven! how accurate in each of theſe, in all their powers and parts, compared with other! So hath God ordered the believing ſoul, that it hath neither too much ſhortneſs of grace, nor too much height of conceit, nor too much breadth of paſſion: ſo hath he ordered his viſible church, that there is a neceſſary inequality, without any diſproportion; an height of government, a length of extent, a breadth of juriſdiction duly anſwerable to each other; ſo hath he ordered his triumphant church above, that it hath a length of eternity, anſwered with an height of perfection, and a breadth of incomprehenſible glory.

In matter; all was here of the beſt: the wood was precious, ſweet, laſting; the ſtones beautiful, coſtly, inſenſible of age; the gold pure and glittering: ſo are the graces of God's children, excellent in their nature, dear in their acceptation, eternal in their uſe; ſo are the ordinances of God in his church, holy, comfortable, irrefragable; ſo is the perfection of his glorified ſaints, incomparable, unconceivable.

In ſituation; the outer parts were here more common, the inner more holy and peculiarly reſerved. I find one court of the temple open to the unclean, to the uncircumciſed; within that, another open only to the *Iſraelites*, and of them, to the clean; within that, yet another, proper only to the prieſts and *Levites*, where was the brazen altar for ſacrifice, and the brazen ſea for waſhing; the eyes of the laity might follow their oblations in hither, their feet might not.

Yet more, in the covered rooms of the temple, there is, whither the prieſts only may enter, not the *Le-*

vites; there is, whither the high-prieſt only may enter, not his brethren.

It is thus in every renewed man, the individual temple of God; the outward parts are allowed common to God and the world; the inwardeſt and ſecreteſt, which is the heart, is reſerved only for the God that made it. It is thus in the church viſible; the falſe and foul-hearted hypocrite hath acceſs to the holy ordinances of God, and treads in his courts; only the true Chriſtian hath entire and private converſation with the Holy One of *Iſrael;* he only is admitted into the holy of holies, and enters within the glorious vail of heaven.

If from the walls we look unto the furniture; what is the altar, whereon our ſacrifices of prayer and praiſes are offered to the Almighty, but a contrite heart? What the golden candleſticks, but the illumined underſtanding, wherein the light of the knowledge of God, and his divine will ſhineth for ever? What the tables of ſhew-bread, but the ſanctified memory, which keepeth the bread of life continually? Yea, if we ſhall preſume ſo far as to enter into the very cloſet of God's oracle; even there, O God, do we find our unworthy hearts ſo honoured by thee, that they are made thy very ark, wherein thy royal law, and the pot of thy heavenly manna is kept for ever; and from whoſe Propitiatory, ſhaded with the wings of thy glorious angels, thou giveſt thy gracious teſtimonies of thy good Spirit, witneſſing with ours, that we are the children of the living God.

Behold, if *Solomon* built a temple unto thee, thou haſt built a temple unto thyſelf in us; we are not only, through thy grace, living ſtones in thy temple, but living temples in thy *Sion.* Oh do thou ever dwell in this thine houſe, and in this thy houſe let us ever ſerve thee! Wherefore elſe haſt thou a temple, but for thy preſence with us, and for our worſhiping of thee?

thee? The time was, when, as thy people, ſo thyſelf didſt lodge in flitting tents, ever ſhifting, ever moving; thence thou thoughtſt beſt to ſojourn both in *Shilo*, and the roof of *Obed-edom*; after that, thou condeſcendedſt to ſettle thine abode with men, and wouldſt dwell in an houſe of thine own at thy *Jeruſalem*. So didſt thou in the beginning lodge with our firſt parents in a tent, ſojourn with *Iſrael* under the law, and now makeſt a conſtant reſidence, under the goſpel, in the hearts of thy choſen children, from whence thou wilt remove no more; they ſhall remove from the world, from themſelves, thou ſhalt not remove from them.

Whereſoever thou art, O God, thou art worthy of adoration; ſince thou ever wilt dwell in us, be thou ever worſhipped in us. Let the altars of our clean hearts ſend up ever to thee the ſweeteſt perfumed ſmokes of our holy meditations and faithful prayers, and cheerful thankſgivings. Let the pure lights of our faith, and godly converſation, ſhine ever before thee and men, and never be put out. Let the bread of life ſtand ever ready upon the pure and precious tables of our hearts. Lock up thy law and thy manna within us, and ſpeak comfortably to us from thy mercy-ſeat. Suffer nothing to enter in hither that is unclean; ſanctify us unto thyſelf, and be thou ſanctified in us.

CONTEM. VI. SOLOMON, *and the Queen of* SHEBA.

GOD hath no uſe of the dark lanterns of ſecret and reſerved perfections; we ourſelves do not light up candles to put them under buſhels. The great lights, whether of heaven or earth, are not intended to obſcurity; but as to give light unto others, ſo to be ſeen themſelves. *Dan* and *Beerſheba* were too ſtrait bounds

bounds for the fame of *Solomon*, which now hath flown over all lands and ſeas, and raiſed the world to an admiration of his more than human wiſdom. Even ſo, O thou everlaſting King of peace, thy name is great among the Gentiles; there is no ſpeech nor language, where the report of thee is not heard; *The ſound of thee is gone forth through all the earth; thy name is an ointment poured out, therefore the virgins love thee.*

No doubt many, from all coaſts, came to learn and wonder, none with ſo much note as this noble daughter of *Cham*, who herſelf deſerves the next wonder to him whom ſhe came to hear and admire; that a woman, a princeſs, a rich and great queen, ſhould travel from the remoteſt ſouth, from *Sheba*, a region famous for the greateſt delicacies of nature, to learn wiſdom, is a matchleſs example. We know merchants that venture to either *Indies* for wealth; others we know daily to croſs the ſeas for wanton curioſity. Some few philoſophers we have known to have gone far for learning; and, amongſt princes, it is no unuſual thing to ſend their ambaſſadors to far diſtant kingdoms, for tranſaction of buſineſſes either of ſtate or commerce: but that a royal lady ſhould in perſon undertake and overcome ſo tedious a journey, only to obſerve and inquire into the myſteries of nature, art, religion, is a thing paſt both parallel and imitation. Why do we think any labour great, or any way long, to hear a greater than *Solomon?* How juſtly ſhall the queen of the South riſe up in judgment, and condemn us, who may hear wiſdom crying in our ſtreets, and neglect her?

Certainly ſo wealthy a queen, and ſo great a lover of wiſdom could not want great ſcholars at home; them ſhe had firſt oppoſed with her enigmatical demands; and now, finding herſelf unſatisfied, ſhe betakes herſelf to this oracle of God. It is a good thing to

doubt,

doubt, better to be reſolved: the mind that never doubts ſhall learn nothing; the mind that ever doubts ſhall never profit by learning. Our doubts only ſerve to ſtir us up to ſeek truth: our reſolutions ſettle us in the truth we have found. There were no pleaſure in reſolutions, if we had not been formerly troubled with doubts; there were nothing but diſcomfort and diſquietneſs in doubts, if it were not for the hope of reſolution: it is not ſafe to ſuffer doubts to dwell too long upon the heart; there may be good uſe of them as paſſengers, dangerous as inmates: happy are we, if we can find a *Solomon* to remove them.

Fame, as it is always a blab, ſo oft-times a liar. The wiſe princeſs found cauſe to diſtruſt ſo uncertain an informer, whoſe reports are ſtill either doubtful or fabulous; and, like winds or ſtreams, increaſe in paſſing. If very great things were not ſpoken of *Solomon*, fame ſhould have wronged him; and, if but juſt rumours were ſpread of his wiſdom, there needed much credulity to believe them. This great queen would not ſuffer herſelf to be led by the ears, but comes in perſon to examine the truth of foreign relations. How much more unſafe is it, in the moſt important buſineſſes of our ſouls, to truſt the opinions and reports of others? Thoſe ears and eyes are ill beſtowed, that do not ſerve to chuſe and judge for their owners.

When we come to a rich treaſure, we need not be bidden to carry away what we are able. This wiſe lady, as ſhe came far for knowledge, ſo, finding the plenty of this vein, ſhe would not depart without her full load; there was nothing wherein ſhe would leave herſelf unſatisfied. She knew that ſhe could not every day meet with a *Solomon;* and therefore ſhe makes her beſt uſe of ſo learned a maſter: now ſhe empties her heart of all her doubts, and fills it with inſtruction. It is not good neglecting the opportunities of furniſh-

furniſhing our ſouls with profitable, with ſaving knowledge. There is much wiſdom in moving a queſtion well, though there be more in aſſoiling it: what uſe do we make of *Solomon*'s teacher, if, ſitting at the feet of Chriſt, we leave our hearts either ignorant or perplexed?

As if the errand of this wealthy queen had been to buy wiſdom, ſhe came with her camels laden with gold, and precious ſtones, and rich odours; though to a mighty king, ſhe will not come to ſchool empty-handed; if ſhe came to fetch an invaluable treaſure, ſhe finds reaſon to give thanks unto him that kept it. As he is a fool that hath a price in his hand to get wiſdom, and wants an heart, ſo is he unthankful, that hath an heart to get wiſdom, and hath no price in his hand; a price not countervailable to what he ſeeks, but retributary to him of whom he ſeeks. How ſhameful is it to come always with cloſe hands to them that teach us the great myſteries of ſalvation.

Expectation is no better than a kind enemy to good deſerts. We leſe thoſe objects which we overlook. Many had been admired, if they had not been overmuch befriended by fame; who now, in our judgment, are caſt as much below their rank, as they were fore-imagined above it. This diſadvantage had wiſe *Solomon* with this ſtranger, whom rumour had bid to look for incredible excellencies; yet ſo wonderful were the graces of *Solomon*, that they overcame the higheſt expectation, and the liberaleſt belief: ſo, as when ſhe ſaw the architecture of his buildings, the proviſions of his tables, the order of his attendants, the religion of his ſacrifices, ſhe confeſſed both her unjuſt incredulity, in not believing the report of his wiſdom, and the injury of report in underſtanding it. *I believed not the words till I came, and mine eyes had ſeen it, and lo the one half was not told me.* Her eyes were more ſure informers than her

her ears. She did not ſo much hear as ſee *Solomon*'s wiſdom in theſe real effects. His anſwers did not ſo much demonſtrate it, as his prudent government. There are ſome whoſe ſpeeches are witty, while their carriage is weak; whoſe deeds are incongruities, while their words are apophthegms. It is not worth the name of wiſdom that may be heard only, and not ſeen. Good diſcourſe is but the froth of wiſdom; the pure and ſolid ſubſtance of it is in well-framed actions; *If we know theſe things, happy are we if we do them.*

And if this great perſon admired the wiſdom, the buildings, the domeſtic order of *Solomon*, and chiefly his ſtately aſcent into the houſe of the Lord, how ſhould our ſouls be taken up with wonder at thee, O thou true Son of *David*, and Prince of everlaſting peace, who receivedſt the Spirit not by meaſure! who haſt built this glorious houſe not made with hands, even the heaven of heavens! whoſe infinite providence hath ſweetly diſpoſed of all the family of thy creatures, both in heaven and earth; and who, laſtly, didſt *aſcend up on high, and ledſt captivity captive, and gaveſt gifts to men!*

So well had this ſtudious lady profited by the lectures of that exquiſite maſter, that now ſhe envies, ſhe magnifies none but them who may live within the air of *Solomon*'s wiſdom: *Happy are the men, and happy are thy ſervants, which ſtand continually before thee, and that hear thy wiſdom!* as if ſhe could have been content to have changed her throne for the foot-ſtool of *Solomon*. It is not eaſy to conceive, how great a bleſſing it is to live under thoſe lips, which do both preſerve knowledge, and utter it. If we were not glutted with good counſel, we ſhould find no reliſh in any worldly contentment, in compariſon hereof: but he that is full, deſpiſeth an honey-comb.

She, whom her own experience had taught how happy a thing it is to have a ſkilful pilot ſitting at the ſtern of the ſtate, bleſſed *Iſrael* for *Solomon*, bleſſeth God for *Iſrael*, bleſſeth *Solomon* and *Iſrael* mutually in each other; *Bleſſed be the Lord thy God which delighteth in thee, to ſet thee on the throne of* Iſrael. *Becauſe the Lord loved* Iſrael *for ever, therefore made he thee king to do judgment and juſtice.* It was not more *Solomon*'s advancement to be king of *Iſrael*, than it was the advancement of *Iſrael* to be governed by a *Solomon*. There is no earthly proof of God's love to any nation, comparable to the ſubſtitution of a wiſe and pious governor: to him we owe our peace, our life, and, which is deſervedly dearer, the life of our ſouls, the goſpel. But, O God, how much haſt thou loved thine *Iſrael* for ever, in that thou haſt ſet over it that righteous Branch of *Jeſſe*, whoſe name is *Wonderful, Counſellor, the Mighty God, the Everlaſting Father, the Prince of Peace, in whoſe days* Judah *ſhall be ſaved, and* Iſrael *ſhall dwell ſafely! Sing, O heaven, and rejoice, O earth, and break forth into ſinging, O mountains; for God hath comforted his people, and will have everlaſting mercy upon his afflicted!*

The queen of *Sheba* did not bring her gold and precious ſtones to look on, or to re-carry, but to give to a wealthier than herſelf. She gives therefore to *Solomon* an hundred and twenty talents of gold, beſides coſtly ſtones and odours. He, that made ſilver in *Jeruſalem* as ſtones, is yet richly preſented on all hands. The rivers ſtill run into the ſea; to him that hath ſhall be given. How ſhould we bring unto thee, O thou King of heaven, the pureſt gold of thine own graces, the ſweeteſt odours of our obediences! Was not this withal a type of that homage which ſhould be done unto thee, O Saviour, by the heads of the nations!

nations! *The kings of* Tarſhiſh *and the iſles bring preſents; the kings of* Sheba *and* Seba *bring gifts; yea all kings ſhall worſhip thee, all nations ſhall ſerve thee!* They cannot enrich themſelves, but by giving unto thee.

It could not ſtand with *Solomon*'s magnificence to receive rich courteſies without a return; the greater the perſon was, the greater was the obligation of requital. The gifts of mean perſons are taken but as tributes of duty. It is diſhonourable to take from equals, and not to retribute: there was not therefore more freedom in her gift, than in her receipt; her own will was the meaſure of both; ſhe gave what ſhe would, ſhe received whatſoever ſhe would aſk; and ſhe had little profited by *Solomon*'s ſchool, if ſhe had not learned to aſk the beſt. She returns therefore more richly laden than ſhe came: ſhe gave to *Solomon*, as a thankful client of wiſdom; *Solomon* returns to her, as a munificent patron, according to the liberality of a king. We ſhall be ſure to be gainers by whatſoever we give unto thee, O thou God of wiſdom and peace! O that we could come, from the remote regions of our infidelity and worldlineſs, to learn wiſdom of thee, who both teacheſt and giveſt it abundantly, without upbraiding, without grudging, and could bring with us the poor preſents of our faithful deſires and ſincere ſervices! how wouldſt thou receive us with a gracious acceptation, and ſend us away laden with preſent comfort, with eternal glory!

CONTEM. VII. SOLOMON'S *defection.*

SINCE the firſt man *Adam*, the world hath not yielded either ſo great an example of wiſdom, or ſo fearful an example of apoſtaſy, as *Solomon*. What human knowledge *Adam* had in the perfection of nature by creation, *Solomon* had by infuſion, both fully,

both from one fountain. If *Adam* called all creatures by their names, *Solomon* ſpake, from the cedars of *Lebanon*, to the moſs that ſprings out of the wall; and, beſides theſe vegetables, there was no beaſt, nor fowl, nor fiſh, nor creeping thing that eſcaped his diſcourſe. Both fell, both fell by one means; as *Adam*, ſo might *Solomon* have ſaid, *The woman deceived me.* It is true indeed, that *Adam* fell as all, *Solomon* as one, yet ſo as that this one is the pattern of the frailty of all. If knowledge could have given an immunity from ſin, both had ſtood. Affections are thoſe feet of the ſoul, on which it either ſtands or falls; Solomon *loved many outlandiſh women.* I wonder not if the wiſe king miſcarried; every word hath bane enough for a man. Women, many women, outlandiſh, idolatrous, and thoſe not only had, but doted on; ſex, multitude, nation, condition, all conſpired to the ruin of a *Solomon*. If one woman undid all mankind, what marvel is it, if many women undid one? yet, had thoſe many been the daughters of *Iſrael*, they had tempted him only to luſt, not to miſdevotion; now they were of thoſe nations, whereof the Lord had ſaid to the children of *Iſrael*, *Go not ye in to them, nor let them come in to you, for ſurely they will turn your hearts after their gods.* To them did *Solomon* join in love; who can marvel, if they diſjoined his heart from God? Satan hath found this bait to take ſo well, that he never changed it ſince he crept into Paradiſe. How many have we known, whoſe heads have been broken with their own rib?

In the firſt world, the ſons of God ſaw the daughters of men, and took them wives of all they liked; they multiplied not children, but iniquities. *Balaam* knew well, if the dames of *Moab* could make the *Iſraelites* wanton, they ſhould ſoon make them idolaters. All lies

lies open, where the covenant is not both made with the eye, and kept.

It was the charge of God to the kings of *Iſrael*, before they were, that they ſhould not multiply wives. *Solomon* hath gone beyond the ſtakes of the law, and now is ready to loſe himſelf amongſt a thouſand bed-fellows. Whoſo lays the reins in the neck of his carnal appetite, cannot promiſe where he will reſt. O *Solomon*, where was thy wiſdom, while thine affections run away with thee into ſo wild a voluptuouſneſs! What boots it thee to diſcourſe of all things, whiles thou misknoweſt thyſelf! The perfections of ſpeculation do not argue the inward power of ſelf-government: the eye may be clear, while the hand is palſied. It is not ſo much to be heeded, how the ſoul is informed, as how it is diſciplined; the light of knowledge doth well, but the due order of the affections doth better. Never any mere man, ſince the firſt, knew ſo much as *Solomon;* many that have known leſs, have had more command of themſelves. A competent eſtate, well huſbanded, is better than a vaſt patrimony neglected.

There can be no ſafety to that ſoul, where is not a ſtrait curb upon our deſires. If our luſts be not held under as ſlaves, they will rule as tyrants. Nothing can prevent the extremity of our miſcarriage, but early and ſtrong denials of our concupiſcence: had *Solomon* done thus, delicacy, and lawleſs greatneſs, had not led him into theſe bogs of intemperance.

The ways of youth are ſteep and ſlippery, wherein as it is eaſy to fall, ſo it is commonly relieved with pity; but the wanton inordinations of age are not more unſeaſonable than odious; yet, behold, *Solomon*'s younger years were ſtudious, and innocent, his over-haſtened age was licentious and miſgoverned: *For when* Solomon *was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods.* If any age can ſecure us from

from the danger of a ſpiritual fall, it is our laſt; and if any man's old age might ſecure him, it was *Solomon*'s, the beloved of God, the oracle, the miracle of wiſdom: who would have looked but that the bloſſoms of ſo hopeful a ſpring ſhould have yielded a goodly and pleaſant fruit in the autumn of age? Yet behold even *Solomon*'s old age vicious. There is no time wherein we can be ſafe, while we carry this body of ſin about us; youth is impetuous, mid-age ſtubborn, old age weak, all dangerous: ſay not now, *The fury of my youthful flaſhes is over, I ſhall henceforth find my heart calm and impregnable;* while thou ſeeſt old *Solomon* doting upon his concubines, yea upon their idolatry.

It is no preſuming upon time, or means, or ſtrength. How many have begun and proceeded well, who yet have ſhamed themſelves in their laſt ſtage? If God uphold us not, we cannot ſtand: if God uphold us, we cannot fall. When we are at the ſtrongeſt, it is the beſt to be weak in ourſelves; and, when at our weakeſt, ſtrong in him, in whom we can do all things.

I cannot yet think ſo hard of *Solomon*, that he would project his perſon to *Aſhtaroth* the goddeſs of the *Sidonians*, or *Milchom* the idol of the *Ammonites*, or *Chemoſh* the abomination of *Moab*. He that knew all things from the ſhrub to the cedar, could not be ignorant that theſe ſtatues were but ſtocks, or ſtones, or metals, and the powers reſembled by them, devils. It is not like, he could be ſo inſenſate to adore ſuch deities; but ſo far was the uxorious king blinded with affection, that he gave not paſſage only to the idolatry of his heatheniſh wives, but furtherance.

So did he dote upon their perſons, that he humoured them in their ſins: their act is therefore his, becauſe his eyes winked at it, his hand advanced it. He that built a temple to the living God, for himſelf and *Iſrael*, in *Sion*, built a temple to *Chemoſh* in the

the *Mount of Scandal*, for his miſtreſſes of *Moab*, in the very face of God's houſe. No hill about *Jeruſalem* was free from a chapel of devils; each of his dames had their puppets, their altars, their incenſe: becauſe *Solomon* feeds them in their ſuperſtition, he draws the ſin home to himſelf, and is branded for what he ſhould have forbidden. Even our very permiſſion appropriates crimes to us. We need no more guiltineſs of any ſin, than our willing toleration.

Who can but yearn, and fear, to ſee the woful wreck of ſo rich and goodly a veſſel? O *Solomon*, wert not thou he, whoſe younger years God honoured with a meſſage and ſtyle of love! to whom God twice appeared, and, in a gracious viſion, renewed the covenant of his favour! whom he ſingled out from all the generation of men, to be the founder of that glorious temple which was no leſs clearly the type of heaven, than thou wert of Chriſt the ſon of the everliving God! Wert not thou that deep ſea of wiſdom, which God ordained to ſend forth rivers and fountains of all divine and human knowledge to all nations, to all ages! wert not thou one of thoſe ſelect ſecretaries, whoſe hand it pleaſed the Almighty to employ in three pieces of the divine monuments of ſacred ſcriptures! Which of us dares ever hope to aſprie unto thy graces? which of us can promiſe to ſecure ourſelves from thy ruins? We fall, O God, we fall to the loweſt hell, if thou prevent us not, if thou ſuſtain us not! *Uphold thou me, according to thy word, that I may live, and let me not be aſhamed of my hope. Order my ſteps in thy word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.* All our weakneſs is in ourſelves, all our ſtrength is in thee. O God, be thou ſtrong in our weakneſs, that our weak knees may be ever ſteady in thy ſtrength.

But, in the midſt of the horror of this ſpectacle, able to affright all the ſons of men, behold ſome glimpſe of

of comfort. Was it of *Solomon* that *David* his father propheſied; *Though he fall, he ſhall not be utterly caſt down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand?* If ſenſible grace, yet final mercy was not taken from that beloved of God; in the hardeſt of this winter, the ſap was gone down to the root, though it ſhewed not in the branches. Even whiles *Solomon* removed, that word ſtood faſt, *He ſhall be my Son, and I will be his Father.* He that foreſaw his ſin, threatened and limited his correction. *If he break my ſtatutes, and keep not my commandments, then will I viſit his tranſgreſſion with a rod, and his iniquity with ſtripes; nevertheleſs, my loving kindneſs will I not utterly take from him, nor ſuffer my faithfulneſs to fail; my covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my mouth.* Behold the favour of God doth not depend upon *Solomon*'s obedience! If *Solomon* ſhall ſuffer his faithfulneſs to fail towards his God, God will not requite him with the failing of his faithfulneſs to *Solomon;* if *Solomon* break his covenant with God, God will not break his covenant with the father of *Solomon*, with the ſon of *David:* he ſhall ſmart, he ſhall not periſh. O gracious word of the God of all mercies, able to give ſtrength to the languiſhing, comfort to the deſpairing, to the dying, life! Whatſoever we are, thou wilt be ſtill thyſelf, O Holy One of *Iſrael*, true to thy covenant, conſtant to thy decree; the ſins of thy choſen can neither fruſtrate thy counſel, nor out-ſtrip thy mercies.

Now I ſee *Solomon*, of a wanton lover, a grave preacher of mortification; I ſee him quenching thoſe inordinate flames with the tears of his repentance. Methinks I hear him ſighing deeply, betwixt every word of that his ſolemn penance which he would needs enjoin himſelf before all the world. *I have applied my heart to know the wickedneſs of folly, even the fooliſhneſs of madneſs, and I find more bitter than*

than death the woman whoſe heart is as nets and ſnares, and her hands as bands: whoſo pleaſeth God ſhall be delivered from her, but the ſinner ſhall be taken by her.

Solomon was taken as a ſinner, delivered as a penitent. His ſoul eſcaped as a bird out of the ſnare of the fowlers; the ſnare was broken, and he delivered. It is good for us that he was both taken and delivered; taken, that we might not preſume; and, that we might not deſpair, delivered: He ſinned, that we might not ſin; he recovered, that we may not ſink under our ſin.

But, O the juſtice of God, inſeparable from his mercy; *Solomon*'s ſin ſhall not eſcape the rod of men: rather than ſo wiſe an offender ſhall want enemies, God ſhall raiſe up three adverſaries unto *Solomon*; *Hadad* the *Edomite*, *Bezon* the king of *Aram*, *Jeroboam* the ſon of *Nebat*; whereof two were foreign, one domeſtical. Nothing but love and peace ſounded in the name of *Solomon*, nothing elſe was found in his reign, while he held in good terms with his God; but, when once he fell foul with his Maker, all things began to be troubled. There are whips laid up againſt the time of *Solomon*'s foreſeen offence, which are now brought forth for his correction. On purpoſe was *Hadad*, the ſon of the king of *Edom*, hid in a corner of *Egypt*, from the ſword of *David* and *Joab*, that he might be reſerved for a ſcourge to the exorbitant ſon of *David*. God would have us make account that our peace ends with our innocence. The ſame ſin, that ſets debate betwixt God and us, arms the creatures againſt us; it were pity we ſhould be at any quiet, while we are fallen out with the God of peace.

BOOK EIGHTEENTH.

CONTEM. I. REHOBOAM.

WHO would not but have looked that ſeven hundred wives, and three hundred concubines, ſhould have furniſhed *Solomon*'s palace with choice of heirs, and have peopled *Iſrael* with royal iſſue? and now, behold, *Solomon* hath by all theſe but one ſon, and him by an *Ammoniteſs!* Many a poor man hath an houſeful of children by one wife, while this great king has but one ſon by many houſefuls of wives. Fertility is not from the means, but from the author: it was for *Solomon*, that *David* ſung, of old, *Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is his reward!* How oft doth God deny this heritage of heirs, where he gives the largeſt heritage of lands, and gives moſt of theſe living poſſeſſions, where he gives leaſt of the dead, that his bleſſings may be acknowledged free unto both, entailed upon neither?

As the greateſt perſons cannot give themſelves children, ſo the wiſeſt cannot give their children wiſdom. Was it not of *Rehoboam* that *Solomon* ſaid? *I hated all my labour which I had taken under the ſun, becauſe I ſhould leave it to the man that ſhall be after me; and who knoweth whether he ſhall be a wiſe man or a fool; yet ſhall he rule over all my labour, wherein I have laboured, and ſhewed myſelf wiſe under the ſun!* All *Iſrael* found that *Solomon*'s wit was not propagated: many a fool hath had a wiſer ſon than this wiſeſt father; amongſt many ſons, it is no news to find ſome one defective; *Solomon* hath but one ſon, and he no miracle of wiſdom. God gives purpoſely ſo eminent an inſtance, to teach men to look up to heaven, both for heirs and graces.

Solomon

Solomon was both the king of *Iſrael*, and the father of *Rehoboam*, when he was ſcarce out of his childhood: *Rehoboam* enters into the kingdom at a ripe age; yet *Solomon* was the man, and *Rehoboam* the child. Age is no juſt meaſure of wiſdom; there are beardleſs ſages, and grey-headed children; not the ancient are wiſe, but the wiſe are ancient. *Iſrael* wanted not for thouſands that were wiſer than *Rehoboam;* yet, becauſe they knew him to be the ſon of *Solomon*, no man makes queſtion of his government: in the caſe of ſucceſſion into kingdoms we may not look into the qualities of the perſon, but into the right. So ſecure is *Solomon* of the people's fidelity to *David*'s ſeed, that he follows not his father's example, in ſetting his ſon by him in his own throne; here was no danger of a rivality to enforce it, no eminency in the ſon to merit it: it ſufficeth him to know that no bond can be ſurer than the natural allegiance of ſubjects. I do not find that the following kings ſtood upon the confirmation of their people; but, as thoſe that knew the way to their throne, aſcended their ſteps without aid. As yet the ſovereignty of *David*'s houſe was green, and unſettled; *Iſrael* therefore doth not now come to attend *Rehoboam*, but *Rehoboam* goes up to meet *Iſrael:* they come not to his *Jeruſalem*, but he goes to their *Shechem: To* Shechem *were all* Iſrael *come to make him king*. If loyalty drew them together, why not rather to *Jeruſalem?* there the majeſty of his father's temple, the magnificence of his palace, the very ſtones in thoſe walls, beſides the ſtrength of his guard, had pleaded ſtrongly for their ſubjection. *Shechem* had been many ways fatal, was every way incommodious. It is an infinite help or diſadvantage that ariſes from circumſtances: the very place puts *Iſrael* in mind of a rebellion; there *Abimelech* had raiſed up his treacherous uſurpation over, and againſt his brethren; there *Gaal* againſt *Abimelech*;

bimelech; there was *Joſeph* ſold by his brethren; as if the very ſoil had been ſtained with perfidiouſneſs. The time is no leſs ill choſen; *Rehoboam* had ill counſel ere he bewrayed it; for had he ſpeedily called up *Iſrael*, before *Jeroboam* could have been ſent for out of *Egypt*, he had found the way clear; a little delay may loſe a great deal of opportunity; what ſhall we ſay of both, but that miſery is led in by infatuation?

Had not *Iſrael* been ſomewhat prediſpoſed to a mutiny, they had never ſent into *Egypt* for ſuch a ſpokeſman as *Jeroboam*, a fugitive, a traitor to *Solomon*: long had that crafty conſpirator lurked in a foreign court. The alliances of princes are not ever neceſſary bonds of friendſhip: the brother-in-law of *Solomon* harbours this ſnake in his boſom, and gives that heat, which is repaid with a ſting to the poſterity of ſo near an ally; and now *Solomon*'s death calls him back to his native ſoil. That *Iſrael* would entertain a rebel, it was an ill ſign; worſe yet, that they would countenance him; worſt of all, that they would employ him. Nothing doth more bewray evil intentions, than the choice of vicious agents. Thoſe that mean well, will not hazard either the ſucceſs, or credit of their actions upon offenſive inſtruments; none but the ſluttiſh will wipe their faces with foul clothes. Upright hearts would have ſaid, as *David* did to God, ſo to his anointed; *Do not I hate them that hate thee? yea, I hate them with a perfect hatred.* *Jeroboam*'s head had been a fit preſent to have been tendered unto their new king; and now, inſtead thereof, they tender themſelves to *Jeroboam*, as the head of their faction.

Had not *Rehoboam* wanted ſpirits, he had firſt, after *Solomon*'s example, done juſtice to his father's traitor, and then have treated of mercy towards his ſubjects; the people ſoon found the weakneſs of their new ſovereign, elſe they durſt not have ſpoken to him

him by ſo obnoxious a tongue; *Thy father made our yoke grievous, make thou it lighter, and we will ſerve thee:* Doubtleſs the crafty head of *Jeroboam* was in this ſuit which his mouth uttered in the name of *Iſrael:* nothing could have been more ſubtile; it ſeemed a promiſe, it was a threat; that which ſeemed a ſupplication, was a complaint; humility was but a vail for diſcontentment; one hand held a paper, the other a ſword. Had they ſaid, Free us from tributes, the capitulation had been groſs, and ſtrongly ſavouring of ſedition; now they ſay, *Eaſe us;* they profeſs his power to impoſe, and their willingneſs to yield; only craving favour in the weight of the impoſition. If *Rehoboam* yield, he blemiſhes his father; if he deny, he endangers his kingdom; his wilfulneſs ſhall ſeem worthily to abandon his ſceptre, if he ſtick at ſo unreaſonable a ſuit: ſurely *Iſrael* came with a purpoſe to cavil; *Jeroboam* had ſecretly troubled theſe waters, that he might fiſh more gainfully. One malecontent is enough to embroil a whole kingdom.

How harſhly muſt it needs ſound in the ears of *Rehoboam*, that the firſt word he hears from his people is a querulous challenge of his father's government; *Thy father made our yoke grievous.* For ought I ſee, the ſuggeſtion was not more ſpiteful than unjuſt. Where was the weight of this yoke, the toil of theſe ſervices? Here were none of the turmoils of war; no trainings, marchings, encampings, entrenchings, watchings, minings, ſieges, fortifications; none of that tedious world of work that attends hoſtility: *Solomon* had not his name for nought; all was calm, during that long reign; and if they had paid dear for their peace, they had no cauſe to complain of an hard match: the warlike times of *Saul* and *David* had exhauſted their blood, together with their ſubſtance: what ingratitude was this to cry out of eaſe? Yea,

but

but that peace brought forth coſtly and laborious buildings: God's houſe, and the king's, the walls of *Jeruſalem*, *Hazor*, *Megiddo*, and *Gezer*, the cities of ſtore, the cities of defence, could not riſe without many a ſhoulder; true, but not of any *Iſraelites*; the remainders of *Amorites*, *Hittites*, *Perizzites*, *Hivites* and *Jebuſites*, were put to all the drudgery of theſe great works; the taſks of *Iſrael* were eaſy and ingenuous, free from ſervility, free from painfulneſs. But the charge was theirs, whoſoever's was the labour. The diet of ſo endleſs a retinue, the attendance of his ſeraglio, the purveyance for his forty thouſand ſtables, the coſt of his ſacrifices, muſt needs weigh heavy, certainly, if it had lain on none but his own. But wherefore went *Solomon*'s navy every three years to *Ophir?* to what uſe ſerved the ſix hundred threeſcore and ſix talents of gold, that came in one year to his exchequer? wherefore ſerved the large tributes of foreign nations? how did he make ſilver to be in *Jeruſalem* as ſtones, if the exactions were ſo preſſive? The multitude is ever prone to pick quarrels with their governors; and whom they feared alive, to cenſure dead. The benefits of ſo quiet and happy a reign are paſt over in ſilence; the grievances are recounted with clamour. Who can hope that merit or greatneſs can ſhield him from obloquy, when *Solomon* is traduced to his own loins?

The propoſition of *Iſrael* puts *Rehoboam* to a deliberation, *Depart ye for three days, then come again to me.* I hear no other word of his that argued wiſdom; not to give ſudden reſolutions, in caſes of importance, was a point that might well beſeem the ſon of *Solomon*. I wonder that he, who had ſo much wit as to call for leiſure in his anſwer, ſhould ſhew ſo little wit in the improving of that leiſure, in the return of that anſwer. Who cannot but hope well to ſee the grey heads of *Solomon*'s ſecret coun-

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cil called to *Rehoboam*'s cabinet? As counſellors, as ancient as *Solomon*'s, they cannot chuſe but ſee the beſt, the ſafeſt courſe for their new ſovereign: they had learned of their old maſter, that *A ſoft anſwer appeaſeth wrath;* wiſely therefore do they adviſe him, *If thou wilt be a ſervant to this people this day, and ſpeak good words to them, they will be thy ſervants for ever.* It was an eaſy condition, with one mouthful of breath to purchaſe an everlaſting homage; with one gentle motion of his tongue, to bind all peoples hearts to his allegiance for ever. Yet, as if the motion had been unfit, a new council table is called. Well might this people ſay, What will not *Rehoboam* grudge us, if he think much to give good words for a kingdom? There is not more wiſdom in taking variety of advice, where the matter is doubtful, than folly, when it is plain. The young heads are conſulted; this very change argues weakneſs: ſome reaſon might be pleaded for paſſing from the younger council to the aged; none for the contrary. Age brings experience; and it is a ſhame, if with the ancient be not wiſdom. Youth is commonly raſh, heady, inſolent, ungoverned, wedded to will, led by humour, a rebel to reaſon, a ſubject to paſſion, fitter to execute than to adviſe. Green-wood is ever ſhrinking and warping, whereas the well-ſeaſoned holds a conſtant firmneſs. Many a life, many a ſoul, many a flouriſhing ſtate hath been ruined by undiſciplined monitors; ſuch were theſe of *Rehoboam*, whoſe great ſtomach tells them, that this conditionating of ſubjects was no other than an affront to their new maſter, and ſuggeſts to them, how unfit it is for majeſty to bruik ſo ſaucy a treaty; how requiſite and princely to cruſh this preſumption in the egg. As ſcorning therefore to be braved by the baſe vulgar, they put words of greatneſs and terror in their new prince; *My little finger ſhall be thicker than my father's*

father's loins; my father made your yoke heavy, I will add to your yoke. My father hath chaſtiſed you with whips, I will chaſtiſe you with ſcorpions. The very words have ſtings: now muſt *Iſrael* needs think, How cruel will this man's hands be, when he thus draws blood with his tongue? Men are not wont to ſpeak out their worſt; who can endure the hopes of him that promiſeth tyranny? There can be no good uſe of an indefinite profeſſion of rigour and ſeverity; fear is an unſafe guardian of any ſtate, much leſs of an unſettled: which was yet worſe, not the ſins of *Iſrael* were threatened, nor their purſes, but their perſons; neither had they deſired a remiſſion of juſtice, but of exactions; and now they hear of nothing but burdens, and ſcourges, and ſcorpions.

Here was a prince and people well met; I do not find them ſenſible of ought, ſave their own profit; they do not ſay, Religion was corrupted in the ſhutting up of thy father's days; idolatry found the free favour of prieſts, and temples, and ſacrifices. Begin thy reign with God; purge the church, demoliſh thoſe piles of abomination, abandon thoſe idolmongers, reſtore devotion to her purity. They are all for their penny, for their eaſe. He, on the other ſide, is all for his will, for an imperious ſovereignty, without any regard, either of their reformation or ſatisfaction: they were worthy of load, that cared for nothing but their backs; and he worthy of ſuch ſubjects, who profeſſed to affect their miſery and torment.

Who would not but have looked any whither for the cauſe of this evil, rather than to heaven! yet the holy God challenges it to himſelf; the cauſe was from the Lord, that he might perform this ſaying by *Abijah* the *Shilonite* to *Jeroboam*. As ſin is a puniſhment of ſin, it is a part of juſtice: the Holy One of *Iſrael* doth not abhor to uſe even the groſſeſt ſins to his own juſt purpoſes. While our wills are free to

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our own choice, his decrees are as neceſſary as juſt; *Iſrael* had forſaken the Lord, and worſhipped *Aſhtaroth* the goddeſs of the *Sidonians*, and *Chemoſh*, and *Milchom*: God owes them and *Solomon* a whipping; the forwardneſs of *Rehoboam* ſhall pay it them. I ſee *Jeroboam*'s plot, the peoples inſolence, the young mens miſadvice, the prince's unreaſonable auſterity, meeting together, through the wiſe Providence of the Almighty, unwittingly to accompliſh his moſt juſt decree. All theſe might have done otherways, for any force that was offered to their will; all would no more do otherways, than if there had been no predetermination in heaven; that God may be magnified in his wiſdom and juſtice, while man wittingly periſheth in his folly.

That three days expectation had warmed theſe ſmoking *Iſraelites*, and made them ready for a combuſtion; upon ſo peremptory a reſolution of rigour, the flame burſts out, which all the waters of the well of *Bethlehem* could never quench. The furious multitude flies out into a deſperate revolt; *What portion have we in* David, *neither have we inheritance in the ſon of* Jeſſe. *To your tents, O* Iſrael; *now, ſee to thine own houſe*, David.

How durſt theſe ſeditious mouths mention *David* in defiance? One would have thought that very name had been able to have tempered their fury, and to have contained them within the limits of obedience. It was the father of *Rehoboam*, and the ſon of *David*, that had led *Iſrael* into idolatry; *Solomon* hath drawn contempt upon his father, and upon his ſon. If *Iſrael* have caſt off their God, is it marvel that they ſhake off his anointed? Irreligion is the way to diſobedience; there can be no true ſubjection, but out of conſcience; they cannot make conſcience of civil duties, who make none of divine.

In vain ſhall *Rehoboam* hope to prevail by his officer, when himſelf is rejected. The perſons of princes carry in them characters of majeſty; when their preſence works not, how ſhould their meſſage? If *Adoram* ſolicit the people too late with good words, they anſwer him with ſtones. Nothing is more untractable and violent than an enraged multitude. It was time for *Rehoboam* to betake himſelf to his chariot; he ſaw thoſe ſtones were thrown at him in his *Adoram*. As the meſſenger ſuffers for the maſter, ſo the maſter ſuffers in his meſſenger. Had *Rehoboam* been in *Adoram*'s clothes, this death had been his; only flight can deliver him from thoſe that might have been ſubjects: *Jeruſalem* muſt be his refuge againſt the conſpiracy of *Shechem*.

Bleſſed be God for lawful government: even a mutinous body cannot want an head. If the rebellious *Iſraelites* have caſt off their true ſovereign, they muſt chuſe a falſe: *Jeroboam*, the ſon of *Nebat*, muſt be the man. He had need be ſkilful, and ſit ſure, that ſhall back the horſe which hath caſt his rider. *Iſrael* could not have anywhere met with more craft and courage than they found in this leader.

Rehoboam returns to *Jeruſalem* lighter by a crown than he went forth; *Judah* and *Benjamin* ſtick ſtill faſt to their loyalty: the example of a general rebellion cannot make them unfaithful to the houſe of *David*: God will ever reſerve a remnant free from the common contagion. Thoſe tribes, to approve their valour no leſs than their fidelity, will fight againſt their brethren for their prince, and will hazard their lives to reduce the crown to the ſon of *Solomon*. An hundred and fourſcore thouſand of them are up in arms, ready to force *Iſrael* to their denied ſubjection. No noiſe ſounded on both parts but military; no man thought of any thing but blood; when ſuddenly God ſends his prophet to forbid the battle, *Shemaiah* comes with

with a meſſage of ceſſation, *Ye ſhall not go up, nor fight againſt your brethren the children of* Iſrael, *return every man to his houſe; for this thing is from me, ſaith the Lord.* The word of one ſilly prophet diſmiſſes theſe mighty armies: he, that would not lay down the threats of his rigour, upon the advice of his ancient counſellors, will lay down his ſword upon the word of a ſeer. Shall we envy or ſhame to ſee how much the prophets of the Old Teſtament could do; how little thoſe of the New? If our commiſſion be no leſs from the ſame God, the difference of ſucceſs cannot go away unrevenged.

There was yet ſome grace in *Rehoboam*, that he would not ſpurn againſt that which God challenged as his own work. Some godleſs ruffian would have ſaid, Whoſoever is the author, I will be revenged on the inſtruments. *Rehoboam* hath learned this leſſon of his grandfather, *I held my peace, becauſe thou Lord haſt done it.* If he might ſtrive with the multitude, he knew it was no ſtriving with his Maker: quietly therefore doth he lay down his arms, not daring, after that prohibition, to ſeek the recovery of his kingdom by blood.

Where God's purpoſes are hid from us, we muſt take the faireſt ways of all lawful remedies; but where God hath revealed his determinations, we muſt ſit down in an humble ſubmiſſion; our ſtruggling may aggravate, cannot redreſs our miſeries.

CONTEM. II. JEROBOAM.

AS there was no public and univerſal conflict betwixt the ten tribes and the two, ſo no peace. Either king found reaſon to fortify the borders of his own territories: *Shechem* was worthy to be dear to *Jeroboam*; a city, as of old, ſeaſoned with many treaſons, ſo now auſpicious to his new uſurpation. The

civil defection was ſoon followed by the ſpiritual. As there are near reſpects betwixt God and his anointed, ſo there is great affinity betwixt treaſon and idolatry; where is a connection betwixt, *Fear God* and *Honour the king;* and no leſs betwixt the neglects of both. In vain ſhall a man look for faith in an irreligious heart.

Next to *Achitophel*, I do not find that *Iſrael* yielded a craftier head than *Jeroboam*'s: ſo hath he plotted this conſpiracy, that, whatever fall, there is no place for a challenge; not his own intruſion, but *Iſrael*'s election hath raiſed him to their throne: neither is his cunning leſs in holding a ſtolen ſceptre. Thus he thinks in himſelf, If *Iſrael* have made me their king, it is but a pang of diſcontentment; theſe violent thoughts will not laſt always; ſudden fits have commonly ſudden recoveries; their return to their loyalty ſhall forfeit my head, together with my crown; they cannot return to God and hold off from their lawful ſovereign; they cannot return to *Jeruſalem*, and keep off from God, from their loyalty: thrice a year will their devotion call them up thither, beſides the exigence of their frequent vows: how can they be mine, while that glorious temple is in their eye, while the magnificence of the royal palace of *David* and *Solomon* ſhall admoniſh them of their native allegiance; while, beſides the ſolicitation of their brethren, the prieſts and *Levites* ſhall preach to them the neceſſity of their due obedience, and the abomination of their ſacrifices in their wilful diſobedience; while they ſhall, by their preſence, put themſelves upon the mercy, or juſtice, of their lawful and forſaken prince? Either therefore I muſt divert them from *Jeruſalem*, or elſe I cannot live and reign; it is no diverting them by a direct reſtraint; ſuch prohibition would both endanger their utter diſtaſte, and whet their deſire to more eagerneſs: I may change religion, I may not inhibit it.

So

So the people have a God, it ſufficeth them; they ſhall have ſo much formality as may content them: their zeal is not ſo ſharp but they can be well pleaſed with eaſe. I will proffer them both a more compendious, and more plauſible worſhip; *Jeruſalem* ſhall be ſupplied within mine own borders. Naturally men love to ſee the objects of their devotion; I will therefore feed their eyes with two golden repreſentations of their God, nearer home; and what can be more proper, than thoſe which *Aaron* deviſed of old to humour *Iſrael?*

Upon this peſtilent ground, *Jeroboam* ſets up two calves in *Dan* and *Bethel*, and perſuades the people, *It is too much for you to go up to* Jeruſalem, *behold thy gods, O* Iſrael, *which brought thee out of the land of* Egypt. Oh the miſchief that comes of wicked infidelity! It was God's prophet that had rent *Jeroboam*'s garment into twelve pieces, and had given ten of them to him, in token of his ſharing the ten tribes; who, with the ſame breath alſo, told him, that the cauſe of this diſtraction was their idolatry. Yet now will he inſtitute an idolatrous ſervice for the holding together of them, whom their idolatry had rent from their true ſovereign to him. He ſays not, God hath promiſed me this kingdom; God hath conferred it; God ſhall find means to maintain his own act; I will obey him, let him diſpoſe of me. The God of *Iſrael* is wiſe and powerful enough to fetch about his own deſigns: but, as if the devices of men were ſtronger than God's providence and ordination, he will be working out his own ends by profane policies. *Jeroboam* being born an *Iſraelite*, and bred in the court of a *Solomon*, could not but know the expreſs charge of God againſt the making of images, againſt the erecting of any rival altars to that of *Jeruſalem;* yet now, that he ſees both theſe may avail much to the advancing of his ambitious project, he ſets up

up thoſe images, thoſe altars. Wicked men care not to make bold with God, in caſes of their own commodity. If the laws of their Maker ly in the way of their profit or promotion, they either ſpurn them out, or tread upon them at pleaſure. Aſpiring minds will know no God but honour. *Iſrael* ſojourned in *Egypt*, and brought home a golden calf; *Jeroboam* ſojourns there, and brought home two: it is hard to dwell in *Egypt* untainted. Not to ſavour of the ſins of the place we live in, is no leſs ſtrange, than for wholeſome liquor, tunned up in a muſty veſſel, not to ſmell of the caſk. The beſt body may be infected in a contagious air. Let him beware of *Egypt*, that would be free from idolatry.

No ſooner are *Jeroboam*'s calves up, than *Iſrael* is down on their knees: their worſhip follows immediately upon the erection. How eaſily is the unſtable vulgar carried into whatſoever religion of authority! The weather-cock will look which way ſoever the wind blows: it is no marvel if his ſubjects be brutiſh, who hath made a calf his god.

Every acceſſary to ſin is filthy, but the firſt authors of ſin are abominable. How is *Jeroboam* branded in every of theſe ſacred leaves! how do all ages ring of his fact, with the accent of diſhonour and indignation! Jeroboam *the ſon of* Nebat, *that made* Iſrael *to ſin*. It was a ſhame for *Iſrael* that it could be made to ſin by a *Jeroboam*: but, O curſed name of *Jeroboam*, that would draw *Iſrael* to ſin. The followers and abettors of evil are worthy of torment, but no hell is too deep for the leaders of public wickedneſs.

Religion is clothed with many requiſite circumſtances. As a new king would have a new god, ſo that new god muſt have new temples, altars, ſervices, prieſts, ſolemnities: all theſe hath *Jeroboam* inſtituted; all theſe hath he caſt in the ſame mould with his golden calves. Falſe devotion doth not more croſs

croſs than imitate the true. Satan is no leſs a counterfeit than an enemy of God; he knows it is more eaſy to adulterate religion, than to aboliſh it.

That which God ordained, for the avoidance of idolatry, is made the occaſion of it; a limitation of his holy ſervices to *Jeruſalem*. How miſchievouſly do wicked men pervert the wholeſome inſtitutions of God to their ſin, to their bane?

Jeroboam could not be ignorant, how fearfully this very act was revenged upon *Iſrael* in the wilderneſs; yet he dares renew it in *Dan* and *Bethel*. No example of judgment can affright wilful offenders.

It is not the metal that makes their gods, but the worſhip, the ſacrifices. What ſacrifices could there be without prieſts? No religion could ever want ſacred maſters of divine ceremonies: God's clergy was ſelect and honourable, branches of the holy ſtem of *Aaron*; *Jeroboam* rakes up his prieſts out of the channel of the multitude; all tribes, all perſons were good enough for his ſpurious devotion. Leaden prieſts are well fitted to golden deities. Religion receives either much honour or blemiſh, by the quality of thoſe that ſerve at her altars. We are not worthy to profeſs ourſelves ſervants of the true God, if we do not hold his ſervice worthy of the beſt.

Jeroboam's calves muſt have ſacrifices, muſt have ſolemn feſtivities, though in a day and month of his own deviſing. In vain ſhall we pretend to worſhip a god, if we grudge him the juſt days and rites of his worſhip.

It is ſtrange, that he, who thought the dregs of the vulgar good enough for that prieſthood, would grace thoſe gods by acting their prieſt himſelf; and yet behold where the new king of *Iſrael* ſtands before his new altar, with a ſcepter in one hand, and a cenſer in the other, ready to ſacrifice to his new gods, when the man of God comes from *Judah* with a meſ-

ſage

ſage of judgment! O deſperate condition of *Iſrael*, that was ſo far gone with impiety, that it yielded not one faithful monitor to *Jeroboam!* The time was, that the erecting of but a new altar, for memory, for monument, on the other ſide of *Jordan*, bred a challenge to the tribes of *Reuben*, *Gad* and *Manaſſes*; and had coſt much *Iſraelitiſh* blood, if the quarrelled tribes had not given a ſeaſonable and pious ſatisfaction: and now, lo, how the ſtronger ſtomach of degenerated *Iſrael* can digeſt new altars, new temples, new gods! What a difference there is betwixt a church and kingdom newly breathing from affliction, and ſettled upon the lees of a miſuſed peace?

But, O the patience and mercy of our long-ſuffering God, that will not ſtrike a very *Jeroboam* unwarned! Judgment hovers over the heads of ſinners, ere it light. If *Iſrael* afford not a bold reprover of *Jeroboam*, *Judah* ſhall. When the king of *Iſrael* is in all the height both of his ſtate and ſuperſtition, honouring his ſolemn day with his richeſt devotion, ſteps forth a prophet of God, and interrupts that glorious ſervice with a loud inclamation of judgment. Doubtleſs the man wanted not wit to know what diſpleaſure, what danger muſt needs follow ſo unwelcome a meſſage; yet dares he, upon the commiſſion of God, do this affront to an idolatrous king, in the midſt of all his awful magnificence. The prophets of God go upon many a thankleſs errand. He is no meſſenger for God, that either knows or fears the faces of men.

It was the altar, not the perſon of *Jeroboam*, which the prophet thus threatens; yet not the ſtones are ſtricken, but the founder, in both their apprehenſions. So dear are the devices of our own brain to us, as if they were incorporated into ourſelves. There is no oppoſition whereof we are ſo ſenſible as that of religion.

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That the royal altar ſhould be thus polluted by dead mens bones, and the blood of the prieſts, was not more unpleaſing, than that all this ſhould be done by a child of the houſe of *David*; for *Jeroboam* well ſaw, that the throne and the altar muſt ſtand or fall together; that a ſon of *David* could not have ſuch power over the altar, without an utter ſubverſion of the government, of the ſucceſſion; therefore is he thus galled with this comminatory prediction. The rebellious people who had ſaid, *What portion have we in* David, hear now, that *David* will perforce have a portion in them; and might well ſee, what beaſts they had made themſelves in worſhiping the image of a beaſt, and ſacrificing to ſuch a god, as could not preſerve his own altar from violation and ruin.

All this while I do not ſee this zealous prophet laying his hand to the demolition of this idolatrous altar, or threatening a knife to the author of this depravation of religion; only his tongue ſmites both, not with foul, but ſharp words, of menace, not of reproach. It was for *Joſias* a king to ſhed the blood of thoſe ſacrificers, to deface thoſe altars: prophets are for the tongue, princes for the hand; prophets muſt only denounce judgment, princes execute.

Future things are preſent to the Eternal. It was ſome two hundred and ſixty years, ere this prophecy ſhould be fulfilled; yet the man of God ſpeaks of it as now in acting. What are ſome centuries of years to the Ancient of days? How ſlow, and yet how ſure is the pace of God's revenge? It is not in the power of time to fruſtrate God's determinations; there is no leſs juſtice, nor ſeverity in a delayed puniſhment.

What a perfect record there is of all names in the roll of heaven, before they be, after they are paſt! Whatever ſeeming contingency there is in their impo-

ſition, yet they fall under the certainty of a decree, and are better known in heaven ere they be, than on earth while they are. He, that knows what names we ſhall have, before we or the world have a being, doth not oft reveal this piece of his knowledge to his creature; here he doth, naming the man that ſhould be two hundred years after; for more aſſurance of the event, that *Iſrael* may ſay, this man ſpeaks from a God who knows what ſhall be. There cannot be a more ſure evidence of a true godhead, than the foreknowledge of thoſe things, whoſe cauſes have yet no hope of being; but becauſe the proof of this prediction was no more certain than remote, a preſent demonſtration ſhall convince the future; *The altar ſhall rend in pieces, the aſhes ſhall be ſcattered.* How amazedly muſt the ſeduced *Iſraelites* needs look upon this miracle! and why do they not think with themſelves, While theſe ſtones rend, why are our hearts whole? Of what an over-ruling power is the God whom we have forſaken, that can thus tear the altars of his corrivals! How ſhall we ſtand before his vengeance, when the very ſtones break at the word of his prophet! Perhaps ſome beholders were thus affected; but *Jeroboam*, whom it moſt concerned, inſtead of bowing his knees for humiliation, ſtretched forth his hand for revenge, and cries, Lay hold on him. Reſolute wickedneſs is impatient of a reproof, and, inſtead of yielding to the voice of God, rebelleth. Juſt and diſcreet reprehenſion doth not more reform ſinners than exaſperate others.

How eaſy is it for God to cool the courage of proud *Jeroboam?* the hand, which his rage ſtretches out, dries up, and cannot be pulled back again; and now ſtands the king of *Iſrael*, like ſome antic ſtatue, in a poſture of impotent endeavour, ſo diſabled to the hurt of the prophet, that he cannot command that piece of himſelf. What are the great potentates of the world, in the

the powerful hand of the Almighty! Tyrants cannot be ſo harmful, as they are malicious.

The ſtrongeſt heart may be brought down with affliction: now the ſtout ſtomach of *Jeroboam* is fallen to an humble deprecation; *Intreat now the face of the Lord thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be reſtored me again.* It muſt needs be a great ſtrait that could drive a proud heart to beg mercy, where he bent his perſecution; ſo doth *Jeroboam*, holding it no ſcorn to be beholden to an enemy. In extremities, the worſt men can be content to ſue for favour, where they have ſpent their malice.

It well becomes the prophets of God to be merciful. I do not ſee this ſeer to ſtand upon terms of exprobration, and overly conteſtations with *Jeroboam*, to ſay, Thine intentions to me were cruel; had thine hand prevailed, I ſhould have ſued to thee in vain: continue ever a ſpectacle of the fearful juſtice of thy Maker, whom thou haſt provoked by thine idolatry, whom thou wouldeſt have ſmitten in my perſecution; but he meekly ſues for *Jeroboam*'s releaſe, and, that God might abundantly magnify both his power and mercy, is heard and anſwered with ſucceſs. We do no whit ſavour of heaven, if we have not learned to do good for evil.

When both wind and ſun, the blaſts of judgment and the beams of favour, met together to work upon *Jeroboam*, who would not look that he ſhould have caſt off his cumbrous and miſbeſeeming cloak of his idolatry, and have ſaid, Lord, thou haſt ſtricken me in juſtice, thou haſt healed me in mercy; I will provoke thee no more. This hand, which thou haſt reſtored, ſhall be conſecrated to thee, in pulling down theſe bold abominations; yet now, behold he goes on in his old courſes, and, as if God had neither done him good nor evil, lives and dies idolatrous. No ſtone is more hard or inſenſate than a ſinful heart: the

changes of judgment and mercy do but obdure it, inſtead of melting.

CONTEM. III. *The ſeduced prophet.*

JEROBOAM's hand is amended, his ſoul is not; that continues ſtill dry and inflexible: yet, while he is unthankful to the author of his recovery, he is thankful to the inſtrument; he kindly invites the prophet whom he had threatened, and will remunerate him whom he endeavoured to puniſh. The worſt men may be ſenſible of bodily favours. Civil reſpects may well ſtand with graceleſneſs. Many a one would be liberal of their purſes, if they might be allowed to be niggardly of their obedience.

As God, ſo his prophet, cares not for theſe waſte courteſies, where he ſees main duties neglected. More piety would have done well with leſs compliment. The man of God returns a blunt and peremptory denial to ſo bounteous an offer; *If thou wilt give me half thine houſe, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread or drink water in this place.* Kindneſs is more ſafely done to an idolater, than taken from him; that which is done to him obligeth him, that which is taken from him obligeth us: this obligation to us may be occaſion of his good, our obligation to him may occaſion our hurt; the ſureſt way is to keep aloof from the infectiouſly wicked.

The prophet is not uncivil, to reject the favour of a prince without ſome reaſon: he yields no reaſon of his refuſal but the command of his God. God hath charged him, *Eat no bread, nor drink no water, nor turn again by the ſame way that thou cameſt.* It is not for a prophet to plead human or carnal grounds for the actions of his function: he may not move but upon a divine warrant. Would this ſeer have looked with the eyes of fleſh and blood, he might have found many

many arguments for his yielding: He is a king that invites me; his reward, by enriching me, may benefit many; and who knows how much my further converſation may prevail to reform him? how can he be but well prepared for good counſel by a miraculous cure? how gainfully ſhould my receipt of a temporal courteſy be exchanged with a ſpiritual to him? all *Iſrael* will follow him either in idolatry, or reformation; which way can be deviſed of doing ſo great ſervice to God and the church, as by reclaiming him? what can yield ſo great likelihood of his reclamation, as the opportunity of my further entireneſs with him? But the prophet dares not argue caſes, where he had a command; whatever become of *Jeroboam* and *Iſrael*, God muſt be obeyed; neither profit, nor hopes, may carry us croſs to the word of our Maker. How ſafe had this ſeer been, if he had kept him ever upon this ſure guard, which he no ſooner leaves than he miſcarries!

So deeply doth God deteſt idolatry, that he forbids his prophet to eat the bread, to drink the water of a people infected with this ſin; yea, to tread in thoſe very ſteps which their feet have touched. If this inhibition were perſonal, yet the grounds of it are common. No peſtilence ſhould be more ſhunned than the converſation of the miſreligious, or openly ſcandalous. It is no thank to us, if their familiarity do not infect us with their wickedneſs.

I know not what to think of an old prophet that dwells in *Bethel*, within the air of *Jeroboam*'s idol, within the noiſe of his ſacrifices; that lives where the man of God dares not eat; that permitted his ſons to be preſent at that idolatrous ſervice. If he were a prophet of God, what did he now in *Bethel?* why did he wink at the ſin of *Jeroboam?* what needed a ſeer to come out of *Judah*, for the reproof of that ſin, which was acted under his noſe? why did he lie?

why

why did his family partake with idolaters? if he were not a prophet of God, how had he true viſions, how had he true meſſages from God? why did he ſecond the menacing word of that prophet, whom he ſeduced? why did he deſire that his own bones might be honoured with his ſepulchre? Doubtleſs he was a prophet of God, but corrupt, reſty, vicious. Prophecy doth not always preſuppoſe ſanctification; many a one hath had viſions from God, who ſhall never enjoy the viſion of God. A very *Balaam*, in his extaſies, hath ſo clear revelation of the Meſſiah to come, as ſcarce ever any of the holieſt prophets; yea, his very aſs hath both her mouth miraculouſly opened, and her eyes, to ſee and notify that angel, which was hid from her maſter: yea, Satan himſelf ſometimes receives notice from God of his future actions; which elſe that evil ſpirit could neither foretel, nor foreſee. Theſe kinds of graces are both rare and common; rare, in that they are ſeldom given to any; common, in that they are indifferently given to the evil, and to the good. A little holineſs is worth much illumination.

Whether out of envy, to hear that ſaid by the ſeer of *Judah*, which he either knew not or ſmothered; to hear that done by another, which he could not have effected, and could not chuſe but admire; or whether out of deſire to make trial of the fidelity of ſo powerful a meſſenger, the old prophet haſtens to overtake, to recal that man of God, who had ſo defied his *Bethel*, whom he finds ſitting faint and weary under an oak in the way, taking the benefit of that ſhade which he hated to receive from thoſe contagious groves that he had left behind him: his habit eaſily bewrayed him, to a man of his own trade; neither doth his tongue ſpare to profeſs himſelf. The old prophet of *Bethel* invites him to return to a repaſt; and is anſwered with the ſame words, where-

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with *Jeroboam*'s offer was repelled: the man of God varies not a ſyllable from his meſſage. It concerns us to take good heed of our charge, when we go on God's errand. A denial doth but invite the importunate; what he cannot do by entreaty the old man tries to do by perſuaſion, *I am a prophet alſo as thou art, and an angel ſpake to me by the word of the Lord, ſaying, Bring him back with thee into thine houſe, that he may eat bread and drink water.* There is no temptation ſo dangerous, as that which comes ſhrouded under a vail of holineſs, and pretends authority from God himſelf. *Jeroboam* threatens, the prophet ſtands undaunted; *Jeroboam* fawns and promiſes, the prophet holds conſtant: now comes a grey-headed ſeer, and pleads a counter-meſſage from God; the prophet yields and tranſgreſſes. Satan may affright us as a fiend, but he ſeduces us as an angel of light.

Who would have looked for a liar under hoary hairs, and an holy mantle? who would not have truſted that gravity, when there was no colour of any gain in the untruth? Nothing is ſo apt to deceive, as the faireſt ſemblances, as the ſweeteſt words. We cannot err, if we believe not the ſpeech for the perſon, but the perſon for the ſpeech. Well might this man of God think, an aged man, a prophet, an old prophet, will not, ſure, bely God unto a prophet; no man will forge a lie, but for an advantage. What can this man gain by this match, but the entertainment of an unprofitable gueſt. Perhaps though God would not allow me to feaſt with *Jeroboam*, yet, pitying my faintneſs, he may allow me to eat with a prophet. Perhaps now that I have approved my fidelity in refuſing the bread of *Bethel*, God thinks good to ſend me a gracious releaſe of that ſtrict charge. Why ſhould I think, that God's revelations are not as free to others, as to me? and if this prophet hath received

ceived a countermand from an angel of God, how ſhall I not diſobey God, if I do not follow him?

Upon this ground he returns with this deceitful hoſt; and, when the meat was now in his mouth, receives the true meſſage of death, from the ſame lips that brought him the falſe meſſage of his invitation; thus ſaith the Lord, *For as much as thou haſt diſobeyed the mouth of the Lord, and haſt not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, but cameſt back and haſt eaten bread, and drunk water in the place forbidden thee, thy carcaſe ſhall not come to the ſepulchre of thy fathers.* O woful prophet! when he looks on his hoſt, he ſees his executioner; while he is feeding of his body, he hears of his carcaſe: at the table he hears of his denied ſepulchre; and all this, for eating and drinking where he was forbidden by God, though bidden as from God. The violation of the leaſt charge of a God is mortal. No pretences can warrant the tranſgreſſion of a divine command: a word from God is pleaded on both ſides; the one was received immediately from God, the other related mediately by man: one the prophet was ſure of, the other was queſtionable. A ſure word of God may not be left for an uncertain: an expreſs charge of the Almighty admitteth not of any check: his will is but one, as himſelf is; and therefore it is out of the danger of contradiction.

Methinks I ſee the man of God change countenance at this ſharp ſauce of his pleaſing morſels; his face before-hand is dyed with the paleneſs of death. Methinks I hear him urging many unkind expoſtulations with his injurious hoſt, who yet diſmiſſes him better provided for the eaſe of his journey than he found him. Perhaps this officiouſneſs was out of deſire to make ſome amends for this late ſeducement. It is a poor recompenſe when he hath betrayed his life, and wronged

wronged the ſoul, to caſt ſome courteſies upon the body.

This old *Bethelite*, that had taken pains to come and fetch the man of God into ſin, will not now go back with him to accompany his departure. Doubtleſs he was afraid to be inwrapped in the judgment which he ſaw hanged over that obnoxious head. Thus the miſchievous guides of wickedneſs leave a man, when they have led him to his bane; as familiar devils forſake their witches, when they have brought them once into fetters.

The man of God returns alone, careful, no doubt, and penſive for his offence, when a lion out of the wood meets, aſſaults, and kills him. O the juſt and ſevere judgments of the Almighty, who hath brought this fierce beaſt out of his wild ranges into the highway, to be the executioner of his offending ſervant! Doubtleſs this prophet was a man of great holineſs, of ſingular fidelity, elſe he durſt not have been God's herald to carry a meſſage of defiance to *Jeroboam*, king of *Iſrael*, in the midſt of all his royal magnificence; yet now, for varying from but a circumſtance of God's command, though upon the ſuggeſtion of a divine warrant, is given for a prey to the lion. Our intereſt in God is ſo far from excuſing our ſin, that it aggravates it: of all others the ſin of a prophet ſhall not paſs unrevenged.

The very wild beaſts are led by a providence; their wiſe and powerful Creator knows how to ſerve himſelf of them. The lions guard one prophet, kill another, according to the commiſſion received from their Maker. What ſinner can hope to eſcape unpuniſhed, when every creature of God is ready to be an avenger of evil? The beaſts of the field were made to ſerve us, we to ſerve our Creator. When we forſake our homage to him that made us, it is no marvel if the beaſts forget their duty to us, and deal with us not as

maſters, but as rebels. When an holy man buys ſo dearly ſuch a ſlight frailty, of a credulous miſtaking, what ſhall become of our heinous and preſumptuous ſins!

I cannot think but this prophet died in the favour of God; though, by the teeth of the lion, his life was forfeited for example, his ſoul was ſafe; yea, his very carcaſe was left, though torn, yet fair, after thoſe deadly graſps; as if God had ſaid, I will only take thy breath from thee, as the penalty of thy diſobedience: a lion ſhall do that which an apoplexy, or fever might do. I owe thee no further revenge than may be ſatisfied with thy blood.

Violent events do not always argue the anger of God; even death itſelf is to his ſervants a fatherly caſtigation.

But, O the unſearchable ways of the Almighty! the man of God ſins, and dies ſpeedily; the lying prophet that ſeduced him ſurvives; yea, wicked *Jeroboam* enjoys his idolatry, and treads upon the grave of his reprover. There is neither favour in the delay of ſtripes, nor diſpleaſure in the haſte; rather whom God loves he chaſtiſes, as ſharply, ſo ſpeedily, while the reſt proſpers to condemnation: even the rod of a loving father may draw blood. How much happier is it for us, that we die now to live for ever, than that we live a while to die ever!

Had this lion ſet upon the prophet for hunger, why did he not devour as well as kill him? why did he not rather kill the beaſt than the man, ſince we know the nature of the lion ſuch, that he is not wont to aſſail man, ſave in the extreme want of other prey? Certainly the ſame power that employed thoſe fangs reſtrained them, that the world might ſee, it was not appetite that provoked the beaſt to this violence, but the over-ruling command of God. Even ſo, O Lord, thy powerful hand is over that roaring lion, that goes about

about continually ſeeking whom he may devour! thine hand with-holds him, that though he may ſhed the blood of thine elect, yet he cannot hurt their ſouls; and while he doth thoſe things which thou permitteſt, and ordereſt to thy juſt ends, yet he cannot do leſſer things which he deſireth, and thou permitteſt not.

The fierce beaſt ſtands by the carcaſe, as to avow his own act, and to tell who ſent him, ſo to preſerve that body which he had ſlain. O wonderful work of God! the executioner is turned guardian; and, as the officer of the Higheſt, commands all other creatures to ſtand aloof from his charge, and commands the fearful aſs, that brought this burden thither, not to ſtir thence but to ſtand ready preſt, to carry it to the ſepulchre: and now, when he hath ſufficiently witneſſed to all paſſengers, that this act was not done upon his own hunger, but upon the quarrel of his Maker, he delivers up his charge to that old prophet, who was no leſs guilty of this blood than himſelf.

This old ſeducer had ſo much truth, as both to give a right commentary upon God's intention in this act, for the terror of the diſobedient, and to give his voice to the certainty of that future judgment which his late gueſt had threatened to *Iſrael:* ſometimes it pleaſeth the wiſdom of God to expreſs and juſtify himſelf, even by the tongues of faulty inſtruments. Withal, he hath ſo much faith and courage, as to fetch that carcaſe from the lion; ſo much pity and compaſſion, as to weep for the man of God, to inter him in his own ſepulchre; ſo much love, as to wiſh himſelf joined in death to that body which he had haſtened unto death. It is hard to find a man abſolutely wicked: ſome grace will bewray itſelf in the moſt forſaken breaſts.

It is a cruel courteſy to kill a man, and then to help him to his grave; to betray a man with our breath,

and then to bedew him with our tears: The prophet had needed no ſuch friend, if he had not met with ſuch an enemy: *The mercies of the wicked are cruel.*

CONTEM. IV. JEROBOAM'S *wife.*

IT is no meaſuring of God's favour by the line of outward welfare: *Jeroboam*, the idolatrous uſurper of *Iſrael*, proſpers better than the true heirs of *David;* he lives to ſee three ſucceſſions in the throne of *Judah;* thus the ivy lives, when the oak is dead. Yet could not that miſ-gotten crown of his keep his head always from aching; he hath his croſſes too. God whips ſometimes more than his own; his enemies ſmart from him, as well as his children; his children in love, his enemies in judgment. Not ſimply the rod argues love, but the temper of the hand that wields it, and the back that feels it. Firſt *Jeroboam*'s hand was ſtricken, now his ſon; *Abijah* the eldeſt, the beſt ſon of *Jeroboam*, is ſmitten with ſickneſs. As children are but the pieces of their parents in another ſkin, ſo parents are no leſs ſtricken in their children, than in their natural limbs; *Jeroboam* doth not more feel his arm, than his ſon: not wicked men only, but beaſts may have natural affections. It is no thank to any creature to love his own.

Nature wrought in *Jeroboam*, not grace; he is enough troubled with his ſon's diſeaſe, no whit bettered: I would have heard him ſay, God follows me with his afflictions, it is for mine impiety; what other meaſure can I expect from his juſtice! while mine idols ſtand, how can I look that my houſe ſhould proſper! I will turn from my wickedneſs, O God, turn thou from thy wrath. Theſe thoughts were too good for that obdurate heart: his ſon is ſick, he is ſorrowful; but, as an amazed man ſeeks to go forth at the wrong

wrong door, his diſtraction ſends him to a falſe help: he thinks not of God, he thinks of his prophet; he thinks of the prophet that had foretold him he ſhould be a king, he thinks not of the God of that prophet who made him a king. It is the property of a carnal heart to confine both his obligations and his hopes to the means, neglecting the author of good. Vain is the reſpect that is given to the ſervant, where the maſter is contemned.

Extremity draws *Jeroboam*'s thoughts to the prophet, whom elſe he had not cared to remember. The king of *Iſrael* had divines enow of his own, elſe he muſt needs have thought them miſerable gods that were not worth a prophet: and, beſides, there was an old prophet, if he yet ſurvived, dwelling within the ſmoke of his palace, whoſe viſions had been too well approved: why ſhould *Jeroboam* ſend ſo far to an *Abijah!*

Certainly his heart deſpiſed thoſe baſe prieſts of his high places, neither could he truſt either to the gods, or the clergy of his own making: his conſcience reſts upon the fidelity of that man whoſe doctrine he had forſaken. How did this idolater ſtrive againſt his own heart, whilſt he inwardly deſpiſed thoſe whom he profeſſed to honour; and inwardly honoured them whom he profeſſed to deſpiſe! Wicked breaſts are falſe to themſelves; neither truſting to their own choice, nor making choice of that which they may dare to truſt. They will ſet a good face upon their ſecretly-unpleaſing ſins, and had rather be ſelf-condemned than wiſe and penitent. As for that old ſeer, it is like *Jeroboam* knew his ſkill, but doubted of his ſincerity; that man was too much his neighbour to be good, *Abijah*'s truth had been tried in a caſe of his own. He, whoſe word was found juſt in the prediction of his kingdom, was well worthy of credit in the news of his ſon. Experience is a great encouragement of

our

our truſt. It is a good matter to be faithful; this loadſtone of our fidelity ſhall draw to us even hearts of iron, and hold them to our reliance; as, contrarily, deceit doth both argue and make a bankrupt. Who can truſt where he is diſappointed! O God, ſo oft, ſo ever have we found thee true in all thy promiſes, in all thy performances, that, if we do not ſeek thee, if we do not truſt thee in the ſequel, we are worthy of our loſs, worthy of thy deſertions.

Yet I do not ſee that *Jeroboam* ſends to the prophet for his aid, but for intelligence. Curioſity is guilty of this meſſage, and not devotion; he calls not for the prayers, nor for the benediction of that holy man, but for meer information of the event. He well ſaw what the prayers of a prophet could do: that which cured his hand, might it not have cured his ſon? yet he that ſaid to a man of God, *Intreat the face of the Lord thy God, that he may reſtore my hand*, ſays not now, in his meſſage to *Abijah*, Intreat thy God to reſtore my ſon. Sin makes ſuch a ſtrangeneſs betwixt God and man, that the guilty heart either thinks not of ſuing to God, or fears it. What a poor contentment it was to foreknow that evil which he could not avoid, and whoſe notice could but haſten his miſery? Yet thus fond is our reſtleſs curioſity, that it ſeeks eaſe in the drawing on of torment: he is worthy of ſorrow that will not ſtay till it comes to him, but goes to fetch it.

Whom doth *Jeroboam* ſend on this meſſage but his wife, and how, but diſguiſed? why her, and why thus? Neither durſt he truſt his errand with another, nor with her in her own form: it was a ſecret that *Jeroboam* ſends to a prophet of God; none might know it but his own boſom, and ſhe that lay in it; if this had been noiſed in *Iſrael*, the example had been dangerous: who would not have ſaid, the king is glad to leave his counterfeit deities, and ſeek to the true?

why

why ſhould we adhere to them whom he forſakes? As the meſſage muſt not be known to the people, ſo ſhe that bears it muſt not be known to the prophet; her name, her habit muſt be changed; ſhe muſt put off her robes, and put on a ruſſet coat; ſhe muſt put off the queen, and put on the peaſant; inſtead of a ſceptre, ſhe muſt take up a baſket, and go a maſked pilgrimage to *Shiloh*. O the fondneſs of vain men, that think to juggle with the Almighty, and to hide their counſels from that all-ſeeing eye! If this change of habit were neceſſary at *Bethel*, yet what needs it at *Shiloh?* though ſhe ſhould hide her face from her ſubjects, yet why ſhould ſhe not pull off her muffler, and ſhew herſelf to the prophet? Certainly, what policy began, guiltineſs muſt continue. Well might ſhe think, there can be no good anſwer expected of the wife of *Jeroboam;* my preſence will do no leſs than ſolicit a reproof. No prophet can ſpeak well to the conſort of a founder of idolatry; I may perhaps hear good as another, though, as for myſelf, I can look for nothing but tidings of evil. Wicked hearts know they deſerve ill at God's hands, and therefore they do all they can to avoid the eyes of his diſpleaſed juſtice, and if they cannot do it by colours of diſſimulation, they will do it by imploration of ſhelter; they ſhall ſay to the rocks, *Fall on us, and cover us.*

But, O the groſs folly mixt with the craft of wickedneſs! could *Jeroboam* think that the prophet could know the event of his ſon's diſeaſe, and did he think he could not know the diſguiſe of his wife! the one was preſent, the other future; this was but wrapt in a clout, that event was wrapt in the counſel of God; yet this politic head preſumes that the greater ſhall be revealed, where the leſſer ſhall be hid. There was never wicked man that was ſo infatuate, and in nothing more than in thoſe things wherein he hoped moſt to tranſcend the reach of others.

Abijah,

Abijah, ſhunning the iniquity of the times, was retired to a ſolitary corner of *Shiloh*; no place could be too private for an honeſt prophet, in ſo extreme depravedneſs; yet even there doth the king of *Iſrael* take notice of his recluſion, and ſends his wife to that poor cell laden with preſents, preſents that diſſembled their bearer; had ſhe offered jewels, or gold, her greatneſs had been ſuſpected; now ſhe brings loaves and cracknels, and honey; her hand anſwers her back; ſhe gives as ſhe ſeems, not as ſhe is. Something ſhe muſt give, even when ſhe acts the pooreſt client.

The prophets of God were not wont to have empty viſitations: they who hated bribes, yet refuſed not tokens of gratitude. Yea, the God of heaven, who neither needs our goods, nor is capable of our gratifications, yet would have no man to come to him giftleſs. Wo to thoſe ſacrilegious hands, that, inſtead of bringing to the prophets, carry from them.

Jeroboam was a bad man, yet, as he had a towardly ſon, ſo he had an obedient wife, elſe ſhe had not wanted excuſes to turn off both the journey and the diſguiſe; againſt the diſguiſe, ſhe had pleaded the unbeſeemingneſs of her perſon and ſtate; againſt the journey, the perils of ſo long and ſolitary a walk. Perhaps a lion might be in the way, the lion that tore the prophet in pieces; perhaps robbers; or, if not they, perhaps her chaſtity might be in danger: an unguarded ſolitarineſs in the weaker ſex might be a provocation to ſome forced uncleanneſs. She caſts off all theſe ſhifting projections of fear; according to the will of her huſband, ſhe changes her raiment, ſhe ſets upon the journey, and overcomes it. What needed this diſguiſe to an old prophet, whoſe dim eyes were ſet with age? all clothes, all faces were alike to a blind ſeer. The viſions of *Abijah* were inward, neither was his bodily ſight more duſky, than the eyes of his mind were clear and piercing. It was not the

the common light of men whereby he ſaw, but divine illumination; things abſent, things future were no leſs obvious to thoſe ſpiritual beams, than preſent things are to us. Ere the quick eyes of that great lady can diſcern him, he hath eſpied her; and, ſo ſoon as he hears the ſound of her feet, ſhe hears from him the ſound of her name, *Come in, thou wife of* Jeroboam. How God laughs in heaven at the frivolous fetches of crafty politicians, and, when they think themſelves moſt ſure, ſhames them with a detection, with a defeat! What an idleneſs it is for fooliſh hypocrites, to hope they can dance in a net, unſeen of heaven!

Never before was this queen troubled to hear of herſelf, now ſhe is; her very name ſtruck her with aſtoniſhment, and prepares her for the aſſured horror of following judgments, *I am ſent to thee with heavy tidings; go tell* Jeroboam, *Thus ſaith the Lord God of* Iſrael. Could this lady leſs wonder at the mercy of this ſtyle of God, than tremble at the ſequel of his juſtice? Lo, *Iſrael* hath forſaken God, yet God ſtill owns *Iſrael*. *Iſrael* hath gone a whoring, yet God hath not divorced her. O the infinite goodneſs of our long ſuffering God, whom our fouleſt ſins cannot rob of his compaſſions!

By how much dearer *Iſrael* was to God, ſo much more odious is *Jeroboam* that hath marred *Iſrael*. Terrible is that vengeance which God thunders againſt him by his prophet, whoſe paſſionate meſſage upbraids him with his promotions, chargeth him with his ſins, and laſtly denounceth his judgments. No mouth was fitter to caſt this royalty in the teeth of *Jeroboam*, than that by which it was firſt foretold, fore-promiſed: every circumſtance of the advancement aggravates the ſin, *I exalted thee;* thou couldeſt not riſe to honour alone. *I exalted thee from among the people*, not from the peers; thy rank was but

common before this riſe: *I exalted thee from among the people to be a prince:* ſubordinate height was not enough for thee, no ſeat would ſerve thee but a throne; *Yea, to be a prince of my people* Iſrael. No nation was for thee but my choſen one, none but my royal inheritance: neither did I raiſe thee into a vacant throne; a forlorn and forſaken principality might be thankleſs; but *I rent the kingdom away from another for thy ſake*, yea, from what other but the grandchild of *David?* out of his hands did I wreſt the ſceptre, to give it into thine. O what high favours doth God ſometimes caſt away upon unworthy ſubjects! How do his abuſed bounties double both their ſin and judgment!

The ſins of this prince were no leſs eminent than his obligations, therefore his judgments ſhall be no leſs eminent than his ſins. How bitterly doth God expreſs that, which ſhall be more bitter in the execution; *Behold, I will bring evil upon the houſe of* Jeroboam, *and will cut off from* Jeroboam *him that piſſeth againſt the wall, and him that is ſhut up and left in* Iſrael, *and will take away the remnant of the houſe of* Jeroboam, *as a man taketh away dung, till it be all gone. Him that dieth of* Jeroboam *in the city ſhall the dogs eat, and him that dieth in the field ſhall the fowls of the air eat.* O heavy load that this diſguiſed princeſs muſt carry to her huſband! But becauſe theſe evils, though grievous, yet might be remote, therefore, for a preſent hanſel of vengeance, ſhe is diſmiſſed with the ſad tidings of the death of her ſon; *When thy feet enter into the city, the child ſhall die.* It is heavy news for a mother, that ſhe muſt loſe her ſon, but worſe yet, that ſhe may not ſee him. In theſe caſes of our final departures, our preſence gives ſome mitigation to our grief. Might ſhe but have cloſed the eyes, and have received the laſt breath of her dying ſon,

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the loſs had been more tolerable; I know not how our perſonal farewel eaſes our heart, even while it increaſes our paſſion; but now ſhe ſhall no more ſee, nor be ſeen of her *Abijah*. She ſhall no ſooner be in the city, than he ſhall be out of the world. Yet more, to perfect her ſorrow, ſhe hears, that in him alone there is found ſome good, the reſt of her iſſue are graceleſs; ſhe muſt loſe the good, and hold the graceleſs; he ſhall die to afflict her, they ſhall live to afflict her.

Yet what a mixture is here of ſeverity and favour in one act? favour to the ſon, ſeverity to the father; ſeverity to the father, that he muſt loſe ſuch a ſon, favour to the ſon, that he ſhall be taken from ſuch a father. *Jeroboam* is wicked, and therefore he ſhall not enjoy an *Abijah*; *Abijah* hath ſome good things, therefore he ſhall be removed from the danger of the depravation of *Jeroboam*. Sometimes God ſtrikes in favour, but more often forbears out of ſeverity. The beſt are fitteſt for heaven, the earth is fitteſt for the worſt; this is the region of ſin and miſery, that of immortality. It is no argument of diſfavour to be taken early from a well-led life, as not of approbation to age in ſin.

As the ſoul of *Abijah* is favoured in the removal, ſo is his body with a burial; he ſhall have alone both tears and tomb, all the reſt of his brethren ſhall have no grave but dogs and fowls, no ſorrow but for their life. Though the carcaſe be inſenſible of any poſition, yet honeſt ſepulture is a bleſſing. It is fit the body ſhould be duly reſpected on earth, whoſe ſoul is glorious in heaven.

CONTEM. V. ASA.

THE two houſes of *Judah* and *Iſrael* grow up now together in an ambitious rivality; this ſplitted plant branches out ſo ſeverally, as if it had forgotten

that ever it was joined in the root. The throne of *David* oft changeth the poſſeſſors, and more complaineth of their iniquity than their remove. *Abijam* inherits the ſins of his father *Rehoboam*, no leſs than his crown; and ſo ſpends his three years, as if he had been no whit of kin to his grandfather's virtues. It is no news that grace is not traduced, while vice is; therefore is his reign ſhort, becauſe it was wicked. It was a ſad caſe, when both the kings of *Judah* and *Iſrael*, though enemies, yet conſpired in ſin. *Rehoboam*, like his father *Solomon*, began graciouſly, but fell to idolatry; as he followed his father, ſo his ſon, ſo his people followed him. O what a face of a church was here, when *Iſrael* worſhipped *Jeroboam*'s calves, when *Judah* built them high places and images, and groves on every high hill, and under every green tree! On both hands God is forſaken, his temple neglected, his worſhip adulterate; and this, not for ſome ſhort brunt, but during the ſucceſſion of two kings: for, after the firſt three years, *Rehoboam* changed his father's religion, as his ſhields, from gold to braſs; the reſt of his ſeventeen years were led in impiety. His ſon *Abijam* trode in the ſame miry ſteps, and *Judah* with them both. If there were any, doubtleſs there were ſome faithful hearts yet remaining in both kingdoms, during theſe heavy times; what a corroſive it muſt needs have been to them, to ſee ſo deplored and miſerable a depravation!

There was no viſible church upon earth but here; and this, what a one? O God, how low doſt thou ſometimes ſuffer thine own flock to be driven! what woful wanes and eclipſes haſt thou ordained for this heavenly body! Yet, at laſt, an *Aſa* ſhall riſe from the loins, from the grave of *Abijam*, he ſhall revive *David* and reform *Judah*. The gloomy times of corruption ſhall not laſt always: the light of truth and

peace

peace ſhall at length break out, and bleſs the ſad hearts of the righteous.

It is a wonder how *Aſa* ſhould be good, of the ſeed of *Abijam*, of the ſoil of *Maachah*, both wicked, both idolatrous. God would have us ſee that grace is from heaven, neither needs the help of theſe earthly conveyances. Should not the children of good parents ſometimes be evil, and the children of evil parents good, virtue would ſeem natural, and the giver would loſe his thanks. Thus we have ſeen a fair flower ſpring out of dung, and a well-fruited tree riſe out of a ſour ſtock: education hath no leſs power to corrupt, than nature. It is therefore the juſt praiſe of *Aſa*, that, being trained up under an idolatrous *Maachah*, he maintained his piety; as, contrarily, it is a ſhame for thoſe, that have been bred up in the precepts and examples of virtue and godlineſs, to fall off to lewdneſs or ſuperſtition. There are four principal monuments of *Aſa*'s virtue, as ſo many rich ſtones in his diadem; he took away ſodomy, and idols out of *Judah*. Who cannot wonder more that he found them there, than that he removed them! what a ſtrange incongruity is this, *Sodom* in *Jeruſalem!* idols in *Judah!* Surely debauched profeſſion proves deſperate; admit the idols, ye cannot doubt of the ſodomy. If they have changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beaſts, and creeping things, it is no marvel, if God give them up to uncleanneſs, through the luſts of their own hearts, to diſhonour their own bodies between themſelves. If they changed the truth of God into a lie, and worſhipped and ſerved the creature more than the Creator, who is bleſſed for ever, no marvel if God give them up to vile affections, to change the natural uſe into that which is againſt nature, burning

burning in luſt one towards another, men with men, working that which is unſeemly.

Contrarily, admit the ſodomy, ye cannot doubt of the idols; unnatural beaſtlineſs in manners is puniſhed juſtly with a ſottiſh dotage in religion, bodily pollution with ſpiritual. How ſhould the ſoul care to be chaſte, that keeps a ſtew in the body! *Aſa* begins with the baniſhment of both, ſcouring *Judah* of this double uncleanneſs. In vain ſhould he have hoped to reſtore God to his kingdom, while theſe abominations inhabited it. It is juſtly the main care of worthy and religious princes to clear their coaſts of the fouleſt ſins. O the impartial zeal of *Aſa!* There were idols that challenged a prerogative of favour, the idols that his father had made; all theſe he defaces: the name of a father cannot protect an idol; the duty to his parent cannot win him to a liking, to a forbearance of his miſdevotion; yea, ſo much the more doth the heart of *Aſa* riſe againſt theſe puppets, for that they were the ſin, the ſhame of his father. Did there want, think we, ſome courtier of his father's retinue, to ſay, Sir, favour the memory of him that begot you; you cannot demoliſh theſe ſtatues, without the diſhonour of their erector; hide your diſlike at the leaſt; it will be your glory to lay your finger upon this blot of your father's reputation; if you liſt not to allow his act, yet wink at it. The godly zeal of *Aſa* turns the deaf ear to theſe monitors, and lets them ſee, that he doth not more honour a father, than hate an idol: no dearneſs of perſon ſhould take off the edge of our deteſtation of the ſin. Nature is worthy of forgetfulneſs and contempt, in oppoſition to the God of nature; upon the ſame ground, as he removed the idols of his father *Abijam*, ſo, for idols, he removed his grandmother *Maachah;* ſhe would not be removed from her obſcene idols, ſhe is therefore removed from the ſtation of her honour.

That

That princeſs had aged, both in her regency and ſuperſtition; under her rod was *Aſa* brought up, and ſchooled in the rudiments of her idolatry; whom ſhe could not infect, ſhe hoped to overawe; ſo, as if *Aſa* will not follow her gods, yet ſhe preſumes that ſhe may retain her own. Doubtleſs no means were neglected for her reclamation; none would prevail. Religious *Aſa* gathers up himſelf, and begins to remember, that he is a king, though a ſon; that ſhe, though a mother, yet is a ſubject; that her eminence could not but countenance idolatry; that her greatneſs ſuppreſſed religion, which he ſhould in vain hope to reform, while her ſuperſtition ſwayed: forgetting therefore the challenges of nature, the awe of infancy, the cuſtom of reverence, he ſtrips her of that command, which he ſaw prejudicial to his Maker. All reſpects of fleſh and blood muſt be trampled on, for God. Could that long ſettled idolatry want abettors? Queſtionleſs ſome or other would ſay, This was the religion of your father *Abijam*, this of your grandfather *Rehoboam*, this of the latter days of your wife and great grandfather *Solomon*, this of your grandmother *Maachah*, this of your great grandmother *Naamah*; why ſhould it not be yours? why ſhould you ſuſpect either the wiſdom, or piety, or ſalvation of ſo many predeceſſors? Good *Aſa* had learned to contemn preſcription againſt a direct law; he had the grace to know it was no meaſuring truth by ſo modern antiquity; his eyes ſcorning to look ſo low, raiſe up themſelves to the uncorrupt times of *Solomon*, to *David*, to *Samuel*, to the Judges, to *Joſhua*, to *Moſes*, to the Patriarchs, to *Noah*, to the religious founders of the firſt world, to the firſt father of mankind, to paradiſe, to heaven. In compariſon of theſe, *Maachah*'s God cannot overlook yeſterday; the ancienteſt error is but a novice to truth; and if never any example could be pleaded for purity of religion, it is enough that

that the precept is expreſs. He knew what God ſaid in *Sinai*, and wrote in the tables, *Thou ſhalt not make to thyſelf any graven image, nor any ſimilitude; thou ſhalt not bow down to them, nor worſhip them.* If all the world had been an idolater, ever ſince that word was given, he knew how little that precedent could avail for diſobedience. Practice muſt be corrected by law, and not the law yield to practice: *Maachah* therefore goes down from her ſeat, her idols from their grove, ſhe to retiredneſs; they to the fire, and from thence to the water: woful deities that could both burn and drown!

Neither doth the zeal of *Aſa* more magnify itſelf in theſe private weedings out of the corruptions of religion, than in the poſitive acts of an holy plantation. In the falling down of thoſe idolatrous ſhrines, the temple of God flouriſhes; that doth he furniſh with thoſe ſacred treaſures, which were dedicated by himſelf, by his progenitors; like the true ſon of *David*, he would not ſerve God coſt free: *Rehoboam* turned *Solomon*'s gold into braſs; *Aſa* turns *Rehoboam*'s braſs into gold. Some of theſe veſſels, it ſeems, *Abijam*, *Aſa*'s father, had dedicated to God; but, after his vow, inquired, yea with-held them. *Aſa*, like a good ſon, pays his father's debts, and his own. It is a good ſign of a well-meant devotion, when we can abide it chargeable; as, contrarily, in the affairs of God, a niggardly hand argues a cold and hollow heart.

All theſe were noble and excellent acts, the extirpation of ſodomy, the demolition of idols, the removal of *Maachah*, the bounteous contribution to the temple; but that which gives true life unto all theſe, is a ſound root. Aſa's *heart was perfect with the Lord all his days.* No leſs laudable works than theſe have proceeded from hypocriſy, which, while they have carried away applauſe from men, have loſt their

their thanks with God. All *Asa*'s gold was but droſs to his pure intentions.

But, O what great and many infirmities may conſiſt with uprightneſs! What alloys of imperfection will there be found in the moſt refined ſoul? Four no ſmall faults are found in true-hearted *Asa*; firſt, the high places ſtood ſtill, unremoved; what high places? There were ſome dedicated to the worſhip of falſe gods, theſe *Asa* took away; there were ſome miſdevoted to the worſhip of the true God, theſe he lets ſtand. There was groſs idolatry in the former, there was a weak will-worſhip in the latter; while he oppoſes impiety, he winks at miſtakings: yet even the variety of altars was forbidden by an expreſs charge from God, who had confined his ſervice to the temple. With one breath doth God report both theſe; *The high places were not removed, yet nevertheleſs* Aſa's *heart was perfect.* God will not ſee weakneſſes where he ſees truth; how pleaſing a thing is ſincerity, that, in favour thereof, the mercy of our juſt God digeſts many an error! O God, let our hearts go upright, though our feet ſlide; the fall cannot, through thy grace, be deadly, however it may ſhame or pain us.

Beſides, to confront his rival of *Iſrael*, *Baaſha*, this religious king of *Judah* fetches in *Benhadad* the king of *Syria* into God's inheritance, upon too dear a rate; the breach of his league, the expilation of the temple. All the wealth, wherewith *Asa* had endowed the houſe of the Lord, was little enough to hire an *Edomite* to betray his fidelity, and to invade *Iſrael*: leagues may be made with infidels; not at ſuch a price, upon ſuch terms; there can be no warrant for a wilful ſubornation of perfidiouſneſs: in theſe caſes of outward things, the mercy of God diſpenſeth with our true neceſſities, not with the affected. O *Asa*, where was thy piety, while thou robbeſt God, to corrupt

an infidel, for the ſlaughter of *Iſraelites!* O princes, where is your piety, while ye hire Turks to the ſlaughter of Chriſtians, to the ſpoil of God's church!

Yet, which was worſe, *Aſa* doth not only employ the *Syrian*, but relies on him, relies not on God; a confidence leſs ſinful coſt his grandfather *David* dear; and when *Hanani*, God's ſeer, the herald of heaven, came to denounce war againſt him for theſe ſins, *Aſa*, inſtead of penitence, breaks into choler: fury ſparkles in thoſe eyes, which ſhould have guſhed out with water; thoſe lips, that ſhould have called for mercy, command revenge: how ill do thoſe two agree, the heart of *David*, the tongue of *Jeroboam?* That holy grandfather of his would not have done ſo; when God's meſſenger reproved him for ſin, he condemned it, and himſelf for it; I ſee his tears, I do not hear his threats. It ill becomes a faithful heart to rage where it ſhould ſorrow, and, inſtead of ſubmiſſion, to perſecute. Sometimes no difference appears betwixt a ſon of *David*, and the ſon of *Nebat*. Any man may do ill, but to defend it, to outface it, is for rebels; yet even upright *Aſa* impriſons the prophet, and cruſheth his gainſayers. It were pity that the beſt man ſhould be judged by every of his actions, and not by all; the courſe of our life muſt either allow or condemn us, not theſe ſudden eruptions.

As the life, ſo the death-bed of *Aſa* wanted not infirmities: long and proſperous had his reign been; now, after forty years health and happineſs, he, that impriſoned the prophet, is impriſoned in his bed. There is more pain in thoſe fetters which God put upon *Aſa*, than thoſe which *Aſa* puts upon *Hanani:* and now, behold, he that in his war ſeeks to *Benhadad*, not to God, in his ſickneſs ſeeks not to God, but to phyſicians. We cannot eaſily put upon God a greater wrong than the alienation of our truſt. Earthly means

means are for uſe, not for confidence; we may, we muſt employ them, we may not rely upon them. Well may God challenge our truſt, as his peculiar, which, if we caſt upon any creature, we deify it. Whence have herbs, and drugs, and phyſicians, their being and efficacy, but from that divine hand! No marvel then if *Aſa*'s gout ſtruck to his heart, and his feet carried him to his grave, ſince his heart was miſcarried, for the cure of his feet, to an injurious miſconfidence in the means, with neglect of his Maker.

CONTEM. VI. ELIJAH *with the* SAREPTAN.

WHO ſhould be matched with *Moſes* in the hill of *Tabor* but *Elijah?* ſurely, next after *Moſes*, there was never any prophet of the Old Teſtament more glorious than he; none more glorious, none more obſcure: the other prophets are not mentioned without the name of their parent, for the mutual honour both of the father and the ſon; *Elijah*, as if he had been a ſon of the earth, comes forth with the bare mention of the place of his birth. Meanneſs of deſcent is no block in God's way to the moſt honourable vocations; it matters not whoſe ſon he be, whom God will grace with his ſervice. In the greateſt honours that human nature is capable of, God forgets our parents: as when we ſhall be raiſed up to a glorious life, there ſhall be no reſpect had to the loins whence we came; ſo it is proportionally in theſe ſpiritual advancements.

Theſe times were fit for an *Elijah*; an *Elijah* was fit for them: the eminenteſt prophet is reſerved for the corrupteſt age. *Iſrael* had never ſuch a king as *Ahab* for impiety, never ſo miraculous a prophet as *Elijah*; this *Elijah* is addreſſed to this *Ahab*. The God of ſpirits knows how to proportion men to the occaſions, and to raiſe up to himſelf ſuch witneſſes, as may be

moſt able to convince the world. A mild *Moſes* was for the low eſtate of afflicted *Iſrael;* mild in ſpirit, but mighty in wonders: mild of ſpirit, becauſe he had to do with a perſecuted, and yet a touchy and perverſe people; mighty in wonders, becauſe he had to do with a *Pharaoh.* A grave and holy *Samuel* was for the quiet conſiſtence of *Iſrael;* a fiery-ſpirited *Elijah* was for the deſperateſt declination of *Iſrael.* And if, in the late times of the depraved condition of his church, God have raiſed up ſome ſpirits, that have been more warm and ſtirring than thoſe of common mould, we cannot cenſure the choice, when we ſee the ſervice.

The firſt word that we hear from *Elijah* is an oath, and a threat to *Ahab*, to *Iſrael: As the Lord God of* Iſrael *liveth, before whom I ſtand, there ſhall not be dew nor rain theſe years, but according to my word.* He comes in like a tempeſt, who went out in a whirl-wind; doubtleſs he had ſpoken fair and peaceable invitations to *Iſrael*, though we hear them not; this was but the ſtorm which followed his repulſe, their obſtinacy. After many ſolicitations and warnings, *Iſrael* is ſtricken by the ſame tongue that had prayed for it; *Elijah* dares avouch theſe judgments to their head, to *Ahab.* I do not ſo much wonder at the boldneſs of *Elijah*, as at his power; yea, whoſo ſees his power, can no whit wonder at his boldneſs: how could he be but bold to the face of a man, who was thus powerful with God? As if God had lent him the keys of heaven to ſhut it up, and open it at pleaſure, he can ſay, *There ſhall be neither dew, nor rain, theſe years, but according to my word.* O God, how far it hath pleaſed thee to communicate thyſelf to a weak man! what angel could ever ſay thus! Thy hand, O Lord, is not ſhortened; why art thou not thus marvellous in the miniſters of thy goſpel! is it for that their miracles were ours! is it for that thou

wouldſt

wouldſt have us live by faith, not by ſenſe! is it for that our taſk is ſpiritual, and therefore more abſtracted from bodily helps! We cannot command the ſun with *Joſhua*, nor the thunder with *Samuel*, nor the rain with *Elijah*; it ſhall content us, if we can fix the Sun of Righteouſneſs in the ſoul, if we can thunder out the judgments of God againſt ſin, if we can water the earthen hearts of men with the former and latter rain of heavenly doctrine.

Elijah's mantle cannot make him forget his fleſh; while he knows himſelf a prophet, he remembers to be a man: he doth not therefore arrogate his power, as his own, but publiſheth it as his maſter's; this reſtraint muſt be according to his word, and that word was from an higher mouth than his. He ſpake from him by whom he ſware, whoſe word was as ſure as his life; and therefore he durſt ſay, *As the Lord liveth, there ſhall be no rain.* Man only can denounce what God will execute, which, when it is once revealed, can no more fail than the Almighty himſelf.

He that had this intereſt and power in heaven, what needed he fly from an earthly purſuit? could his prayers reſtrain the clouds, and not hold the hands of fleſh and blood! yet behold *Elijah* muſt fly from *Ahab*, and hide him by the brook *Cherith*. The wiſdom of God doth not think fit ſo to make a beaten path of miracles, as that he will not walk beſide it: he will have our own endeavours concur to our preſervation. *Elijah* wanted neither courage of heart, nor ſtrength of hand, and yet he muſt truſt to his feet for ſafety; how much more lawful is it, for our impotence, to fly from perſecution? Even that God ſends him to hide his head, who could as eaſily have protected as nouriſhed him. He that wilfully ſtands ſtill to catch dangers, tempteth God inſtead of truſting him.

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The prophet muſt be gone, not without order taken for his purveyance: O the ſtrange caterers for *Elijah! I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.* I know not whether had been more miraculous, to preſerve him without meat, or to provide meat by ſuch mouths. The raven, a devouring and ravenous fowl, that uſes to ſnatch away meat from others, brings it to him. He, that could have fed *Elijah* by angels, will feed him by ravens. There was then in *Iſrael* an hoſpitable *Obadiah*, that kept a ſecret table, in two ſeveral caves, for an hundred prophets of God. There were ſeven thouſand faithful *Iſraelites*, in ſpite of the devil, who had never bowed knee to *Baal:* doubtleſs, any of theſe would have had a trencher ready for *Elijah*, and have thought himſelf happy to have defrauded his own belly for ſo noble a prophet; God rather chuſes to make uſe of the moſt unlikely fowls of the air, than their bounty, that he might give both to his prophet, and us, a pregnant proof of his abſolute command over all his creatures, and win our truſt in all extremities. Who can make queſtion of the proviſions of God, when he ſees the very ravens ſhall forget their own hunger, and purvey for *Elijah?* O God, thou that provideſt meat for the fowls of the air, wilt make the fowls of the air provide meat for man, rather than his dependence on thee ſhall be diſappointed! O let not our faith be wanting to thee; thy care can never be wanting to us!

Elijah might have lived for the time with bread and water; neither had his fare been worſe than his fellows in the caves of *Obadiah;* but the munificence of God will have his meals better furniſhed. The ravens ſhall bring him both bread and fleſh twice in the day. It is not for a perſecuted prophet to long after delicates: God gives order for competency, not for wantonneſs; not out of the dainty compoſitions in *Jezebel*'s kitchen, not out of the pleaſant wines in her cellar,

cellar, would God provide for *Elijah;* but the ravens ſhall bring him plain and homely victuals, and the river ſhall afford him drink: if we have wherewith to ſuſtain nature, though not to pamper it, we owe thanks to the giver. Thoſe of God's family may not be curious, not diſdainful. Ill doth it become a ſervant of the Higheſt to be a ſlave to his palate. Doubtleſs, one bit from the mouth of the raven was more pleaſing to *Elijah*, than a whole table-full of *Ahab*'s. Nothing is more comfortable to God's children, than to ſee the ſenſible demonſtrations of the divine care and providence.

The brook *Cherith* cannot laſt always; that ſtream ſhall not, for *Elijah*'s ſake, be exempted from the univerſal exſiccation: yea, the prophet himſelf feels the ſmart of this drought, which he had denounced. It is no unuſual thing with God, to ſuffer his own dear children to be inwrapped in the common calamities of offenders. He makes difference in the uſe and iſſue of their ſtripes, not in the infliction. The corn is cut down with the weeds, but to a better purpoſe.

When the brook fails, God hath a *Sarepta* for *Elijah;* inſtead of the ravens, a widow ſhall there feed him, yea herſelf by him. Who can enough wonder at the pitch of this ſelective providence of the Almighty? *Sarepta* was a town of *Sidon*, and therefore without the pale of the church: poverty was the beſt of this widow, ſhe was a Pagan by birth, heatheniſhly ſuperſtitious by inſtitution. Many widows were in *Iſrael* in the days of *Elijah*, when the heaven was ſhut up three years and ſix months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was *Elijah* ſent, ſave unto this *Sarepta*, a city of *Sidon*, unto a woman that was a widow. He, that firſt fed the prophet by the mouth of unclean fowls, will now feed him by the hand of an heatheniſh hoſteſs; his only command ſanctifies thoſe crea-

creatures, which, by a general charge, were legally impure.

There were other birds beſides ravens, other widows beſides this *Sareptan*; none but the ravens, none but the *Sareptan* ſhall nouriſh *Elijah*. God's choice is not led in the ſtring of human reaſons, his holy will is the guide, and the ground of all his elections. *It is not in him that wills, nor in him that runs, but in God that ſhows mercy.*

The prophet follows the call of his God; the ſame hand that brought him to the gate of *Sarepta*, led alſo this poor widow out of her doors; ſhe ſhall then go to ſeek her ſticks, when ſhe ſhall be found of *Elijah*; ſhe thought of her hearth, ſhe thought not of a prophet, when the man of God calls to her, *Fetch me a little water, I pray thee, in a veſſel, that I may drink.* It was no eaſy ſuit in ſo droughty a ſeaſon; and yet, at the firſt ſight, the prophet dares ſecond it with a greater, *Bring me a morſel of bread in thine hand.* That long drought had made every drop, every crumb precious; yet the prophet is emboldened by the charge of God to call for both water and bread; he had found the ravens ſo officious, that he cannot make doubt of the *Sareptan*. She ſticks not at the water; ſhe would not ſtick at the bread, if neceſſity had not preſſed her. *As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruſe; and behold I am gathering two ſticks, that I may go in and dreſs it for me and my ſon, that we may eat it and die.*

If ſhe knew not the man, how did ſhe know his God! and if ſhe knew not the God of *Elijah*, how did ſhe ſwear by him! Certainly though ſhe were without the bounds of *Iſrael*, yet ſhe was within the borders; ſo much ſhe had gained by her neighbourhood, to know an *Iſraelite*, a prophet by his habit;

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to know the only living God was the God of the prophet, the God of *Iſrael;* and if this had not been, yet it is no marvel if the widow knew *Elijah*, ſince the ravens knew him. It was high time for the prophet to viſit the *Sareptan;* poor ſoul, ſhe was now making her laſt meal; after one mean morſel ſhe was yielding herſelf over to death. How opportunely hath God provided ſuccours to our diſtreſſes! It is his glory to help at a pinch, to begin where we have given over; that our relief might be ſo much the more welcome, by how much it is leſs looked for.

But, O what a trial is this of the faith of a weak proſelyte, if ſhe were ſo much! *Fear not, go do as thou haſt ſaid; but make me thereof a litte cake firſt, and bring it to me; and after, make for thee and thy ſon: for thus ſaith the God of* Iſrael, *the barrel of meal ſhall not waſte, nor the cruſe of oil fail, till the day that God ſend rain upon the earth.* She muſt go ſpend upon a ſtranger part of that little ſhe hath, in hope of more which ſhe hath not, which ſhe may have; ſhe muſt part with her preſent food which ſhe ſaw, in truſt of future which ſhe could not ſee; ſhe muſt rob her ſenſe in the exerciſe of her belief, and ſhorten her life in being, upon the hope of a protraction of it in promiſe; ſhe muſt believe God will miraculouſly increaſe what ſhe hath yielded to conſume; ſhe muſt firſt feed the ſtranger with her laſt victuals, and then, after, herſelf and her ſon. Some ſharp dame would have taken up the prophet, and have ſent him away with an angry repulſe: Bold *Iſraelite*, there is no reaſon in this requeſt; wert thou a friend or a brother, with what face couldſt thou require to pull my laſt bit out of my mouth? had I ſuperfluity of proviſion, thou mightſt hope for this effect of my charity; now, that I have but one morſel for myſelf and my ſon, this is an injurious importunity; what can induce thee to think thy life, an un-

known traveller, ſhould be more dear to me than my ſon's, than my own? how uncivil is this motion, that I ſhould firſt make proviſion for thee, in this dying extremity? it had been too much to have begged my laſt ſcraps. Thou telleſt me, the meal ſhall not waſte, nor the oil fail; how ſhall I believe thee? let me ſee that done before thou eateſt; in vain ſhould I challenge thee, when the remainder of my poor ſtore is conſumed. If thou canſt ſo eaſily multiply victuals, how is it that thou wanteſt? Do that before-hand, which thou promiſeſt ſhall be afterwards performed, there will be no need of my little. But this good *Sareptan* was wrought on by God not to miſtruſt a prophet; ſhe will do what he bids, and hope for what he promiſes; ſhe will live by faith rather than by ſenſe, and give away the preſent, in the confidence of a future remuneration: firſt ſhe bakes *Elijah*'s cake, then her own, not grudging to ſee her laſt morſels go down another's throat, while herſelf was famiſhing. How hard precepts doth God lay, where he intends bounty! Had not God meant her preſervation, he had ſuffered her to eat her laſt cake alone, without any interpellation; now the mercy of the Almighty purpoſing as well this miraculous favour to her, as to his prophet, requires of her this taſk, which fleſh and blood would have thought unreaſonable. So we are wont to put hard queſtions to thoſe ſcholars, whom we would promote to higher forms. So, in all atchievements, the difficulty of the enterpriſe makes way for the glory of the actor.

Happy was it for this widow, that ſhe did not ſhut her hand to the man of God, that ſhe was not niggard of her laſt handful: never corn or oil did ſo increaſe in growing, as here in conſuming. This barrel, this cruſe of hers had no bottom, the barrel of meal waſted not, the cruſe of oil failed not: behold, not getting, not ſaving, is the way to abundance, but giving.

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The mercy of God crowns our beneficence with the bleſſing of ſtore; who can fear want by a merciful liberality, when he ſees the *Sareptan* had famiſhed, if ſhe had not given, and by giving, abounded? With what thankful devotion muſt this woman every day needs look upon her barrel and cruſe, wherein ſhe ſaw the mercy of God renewed to her continually? Doubtleſs her ſoul was no leſs fed by faith, than her body with this ſupernatural proviſion. How welcome a gueſt muſt *Elijah* needs be to this widow, that gave her life and her ſon's to her for his board! yea that, in that woful famine, gave her and her ſon their board for his houſe-room.

The dearth thus overcome, the mother looks hopefully upon her only ſon, promiſing herſelf much joy in his life and proſperity, when an unexpected ſickneſs ſurpriſeth him, and doth that which the famine but threatened. When can we hold ourſelves ſecure from evils? no ſooner is one of theſe ſerjeants compounded withal, than we are arreſted by another.

How ready are we to miſtake the grounds of our afflictions, and to caſt them upon falſe cauſes. The paſſionate mother cannot find whether to impute the death of her ſon, but to the preſence of *Elijah*, to whom ſhe comes diſtracted with perplexity, not without an unkind challenge of him, from whom ſhe had received both that life ſhe had loſt, and that ſhe had; *What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God, art thou come to me to call my ſin to remembrance, and to ſlay my ſon?*

As if her ſon could not have died, if *Elijah* had not been her gueſt, whereas her ſon had died, but for him; why ſhould ſhe think that the prophet had ſaved him from the famine, to kill him with ſickneſs? as if God had not been free in his actions, and muſt needs ſtrike by the ſame hands by which he preſerved. She had the grace to know that her affliction was

for her ſin; yet was ſo unwiſe, to imagine the arrearages of her iniquities had not been called for, if *Elijah* had not been the remembrancer; he, who had appeaſed God towards her, is ſuſpected to have incenſed him: this wrongful miſconſtruction was enough to move any patience. *Elijah* was of an hot ſpirit; yet his holineſs kept him from fury: this challenge rather increaſed the zeal of his prayer, than ſtirred his choler to the offendent. He takes the dead child out of his mother's boſom, and lays him upon his own bed, and cries unto the Lord, *O Lord my God, haſt thou brought evil alſo upon the widow with whom I ſojourn, by ſlaying her ſon?* Inſtead of chiding the *Sareptan*, out of the fervency of his ſoul, he humbly expoſtulates with his God: his only remedy is in his prayer; that which ſhut heaven for rain, muſt open it for life. Every word inforceth; firſt, he pleads his intereſt in God, *O Lord my God;* then the quality of the patient, *a widow*, and therefore both moſt diſtreſſed with the loſs, and moſt peculiar to the charge of the Almighty. Then his intereſt, as in God, ſo in this patient, *with whom I ſojourn;* as if the ſtroke were given to himſelf, through her ſides; and laſtly, the quality of the puniſhment, *by ſlaying her ſon*, the only comfort of her life: and in all theſe implying the ſcandal that muſt needs ariſe from this event, wherever it ſhould be noiſed, to the name of his God, to his own; when it ſhould be ſaid, Lo, how *Elijah*'s entertainment is rewarded: ſurely the prophet is either impotent, or unthankful.

Neither doth his tongue move thus only; thrice doth he ſtretch himſelf upon the dead body, as if he could wiſh to infuſe of his own life into the child, and ſo often calls to his God for the reſtitution of that ſoul. What can *Elijah* aſk to be denied? the Lord heard the voice of the prophet, the ſoul of the child came

came into him again, and he revived. What miracle is impoſſible to faithful prayers? There cannot be more difference betwixt *Elijah*'s devotion and ours, than betwixt ſupernatural and ordinary acts; if he therefore obtained miraculous favours by his prayers, do we doubt of thoſe which are within the ſphere of nature and uſe? What could we want, if we did not ſlack to ply heaven with our prayers?

Certainly *Elijah* had not been premoniſhed of this ſudden ſickneſs and death of the child; he who knew the remote affairs of the world, might not know what God would do within his own roof. The greateſt prophet muſt content himſelf with ſo much of God's counſel, as he will pleaſe to reveal; and he will ſometimes reveal the greater ſecrets, and conceal the leſs, to make good both his own liberty, and man's humiliation. So much more unexpected as the ſtroke was, ſo much more welcome is the cure. How joyfully doth the man of God take the revived child into his arms, and preſent him to his mother? How doth his heart leap within him, at this proof of God's favour to him, mercy to the widow, power to the child.

What life and joy did now ſhow itſelf in the face of that amazed mother, when ſhe ſaw again the eyes of her ſon fixed upon her's; when ſhe felt his fleſh warm, his motions vital! Now ſhe can ſay to *Elijah*, *By this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth.* Did ſhe not till now know this? had ſhe not ſaid before, *What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God?* Were not her cruſe and her barrel ſufficient proofs of his divine commiſſion? Doubtleſs, what her meal and oil had aſſured her of, the death of her ſon made her to doubt; and now the reviving did re-aſcertain. Even the ſtrongeſt faith ſometimes ſtaggereth, and needeth new acts of heavenly ſupportation; the end of miracles is confirmation of truth. It ſeems, had this widow's

widow's ſon continued dead, her belief had been buried in his grave: notwithſtanding her meal and her oil, her ſoul had languiſhed. The mercy of God is fain to provide new helps for our infirmities, and graciouſly condeſcends to our own terms, that he may work out our faith and ſalvation.

CONTEM. VII. ELIJAH *with the* BAALITES.

THREE years and an half did *Iſrael* ly gaſping under a parching drought and miſerable famine. No creature was ſo odious to them as *Elijah*, to whom they aſcribed all their miſery. Methinks I hear how they railed on, and curſed the prophet: how much envy muſt the ſervants of God undergo for their maſter! nothing but the tongue was *Elijah*'s, the hand was God's; the prophet did but ſay what God would do. I do not ſee them fall out with their ſins, that had deſerved the judgment, but with the meſſenger that denounced it. *Baal* had no fewer ſervants, than if there had been both rain and plenty. *Elijah* ſafely ſpends this ſtorm under the lee of *Sarepta;* ſome three years had he lain cloſe in that obſcure corner, and lived upon the barrel and cruſe which he had multiplied: at laſt God calls him forth, *Go ſhew thyſelf to* Ahab, *and I will ſend rain upon the earth:* no rain muſt fall till *Elijah* was ſeen of *Ahab;* he carried away the clouds with him, he muſt bring them again. The king, the people of *Iſrael*, ſhall be witneſſes that God will make good the word, the oath of his prophet. Should the rain have fallen in *Elijah*'s abſence, who could have known it was by his procurement? God holds the credit of his meſſengers precious, and neglects nothing that may grace them in the eyes of the world; not the neceſſity of ſeven thouſand religious *Iſraelites* could crack the word of one *Elijah*. There is nothing wherein God

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is more tender, than in approving the veracity of himſelf in his miniſters.

Lewd *Ahab* hath an holy ſteward; as his name was, ſo was he a ſervant of God, while his maſter was a ſlave to *Baal*. He, that reſerved ſeven thouſand in the kingdom of *Iſrael*, hath reſerved an *Obadiah* in the court of *Iſrael;* and by him hath reſerved them. Neither is it likely there had been ſo many free hearts in the country, if religion had not been ſecretly backed in the court: it is a great happineſs when God gives favour and honour to the virtuous. *Elijah* did not ly more cloſe in *Sarepta*, than *Obadiah* did in the court; he could not have done ſo much ſervice to the church, if he had not been as ſecret as good. Policy and religion do as well together, as they do ill aſunder. The dove, without the ſerpent, is eaſily caught; the ſerpent, without the dove, ſtings deadly. Religion, without policy, is too ſimple to be ſafe; policy, without religion, is too ſubtile to be good: their match makes themſelves ſecure, and many happy.

O degenerated eſtate of *Iſrael!* any thing was now lawful there, ſaving piety. It is well if God's prophets can find an hole to hide their heads in; they muſt needs be hard driven, when fifty of them are fain to crowd together in one cave: there they had both ſhade and repaſt. Good *Obadiah* hazards his own life to preſerve theirs, and ſpends himſelf in that extreme dearth, upon their neceſſary diet: bread and water was more now, than other whiles wine and delicates. Whether ſhall we wonder more at the mercy of God in reſerving an hundred prophets, or in thus ſuſtaining them being reſerved? When did God ever leave his *Iſrael* unfurniſhed of ſome prophets? when did he leave his prophets unprovided of ſome *Obadiah?* How worthy art thou, O Lord, to be truſted with thine own charge! While there are men

men upon earth, or birds in the air, or angels in heaven, thy meſſengers cannot want proviſion.

Goodneſs carries away truſt, where it cannot have imitation. *Ahab* divides with *Obadiah* the ſurvey of the whole land; they two ſet their own eyes on work, for the ſearch of water, of paſture, to preſerve the horſes and mules alive. O the poor and vain cares of *Ahab!* he caſts to kill the prophet, to ſave the cattle; he never ſeeks to ſave his own ſoul, to deſtroy idolatry; he takes thought for graſs, none for mercy. Carnal hearts are ever either grovelling on the earth, or delving into it; no more regarding God or their ſouls, than if they either were not, or were worthleſs.

Elijah hears of the progreſs, and offers himſelf to the view of them both. Here was wiſdom in this courage; firſt, he preſents himſelf to *Obadiah*, ere he will be ſeen of *Ahab*, that *Ahab* might, upon the report of ſo diſcreet an informer, digeſt the expectation of his meeting; then he takes the opportunity of *Ahab*'s preſence, when he might be ſure *Jezebel* was away.

Obadiah meets the prophet, knows him, and, as if he had ſeen God in him, falls on his face to him, whom he knew his maſter perſecuted: though a great peer, he had learned to honour a prophet. No reſpect was too much for the preſident of that ſacred college. To the poor boarder of the *Sareptan*, here was no leſs than a proſtration, and my lord *Elijah*, from the great high ſteward of *Iſrael*. Thoſe that are truly gracious cannot be niggardly of their obſervances to the meſſengers of God.

Elijah receives the reverence, returns a charge; *Go tell thy lord, Behold* Elijah *is here*. *Obadiah* finds this load too heavy; neither is he more ſtricken with the boldneſs, than with the unkindneſs of this command; boldneſs in reſpect of *Elijah*, unkindneſs

kindneſs in reſpect of himſelf: for thus he thinks, If *Elijah* do come to *Ahab*, he dies; if he do not come, I die: if it be known that I met him, and brought him not, it is death; if I ſay that he will come voluntarily, and God ſhall alter his intentions, it is death. How unhappy a man am I, that muſt be either *Elijah*'s executioner, or my own! Were *Ahab*'s diſpleaſure but ſmoking, I might hope to quench it; but now that the flame of it hath broken forth to the notice, to the ſearch of all the kingdoms and nations round about, it may conſume me, I cannot extinguiſh it: this meſſage was for an enemy of *Elijah*, for a client of *Baal*. As for me, I have well approved my true devotion to God, my love to his prophets: what have I done, that I ſhould be ſingled out either to kill *Elijah*, or to be killed for him? Many an hard plunge muſt that man needs be driven to, who would hold his conſcience together with the ſervice and favour of a tyrant. It is an happy thing to ſerve a juſt maſter; there is no danger, no ſtain in ſuch obedience.

But, when the prophet binds his reſolution with an oath, and clears the heart of *Obadiah* from all fears, from all ſuſpicions, the good man dares be the meſſenger of that which he ſaw was decreed in heaven. Doubtleſs *Ahab* ſtartled to hear of *Elijah* coming to meet him, as one that did not more hate, than fear the prophet. Well might he think, Thus long, thus far have I ſought *Elijah*, *Elijah* would not come to ſeek me, but under a ſure guard, and with ſome ſtrange commiſſion; his coarſe mantle hath the advantage of my robe and ſceptre; if I can command a piece of the earth, I ſee he can command heaven. The edge of his revenge is taken off with a doubtful expectation of the iſſue; and now, when *Elijah* offers himſelf to the eyes of *Ahab*, he, who durſt not ſtrike, yet durſt challenge the prophet, *Art thou he that*

troubleth Iſrael? *Jeroboam*'s hand was ſtill in *Ahab*'s thoughts; he holds it not ſo ſafe to ſmite, as to expoſtulate. He, that was the head of *Iſrael*, ſpeaks out that which was in the heart of all his people, that *Elijah* was the cauſe of all their ſorrow. Alas, what hath the righteous prophet done! he taxed their ſin, he foretold the judgment, he deſerved it not, he inflicted it not; yet he ſmarts, and they are guilty: as if ſome fond people ſhould accuſe the herald or the trumpet as the cauſe of their war; or, as if ſome ignorant peaſant, when he ſees his fowls bathing in his pond, ſhould cry out of them as the cauſes of foul weather.

O the heroical ſpirit of *Elijah!* he ſtands alone amidſt all the train of *Ahab*, and dares not only repel this charge, but retort it; *I have not troubled* Iſrael, *but thou and thy father's houſe, in that ye have forſaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou haſt followed* Baalim. No earthly glory can daunt him, who hath the clear and heartening viſions of God; this holy ſeer diſcerns the true cauſe of our ſufferings to be our ſins: fooliſh men are plagued for their offences; and it is no ſmall part of their plague that they ſee it not. The only common diſturber of men, families, cities, kingdoms, worlds, is ſin; there is no ſuch traitor to any ſtate, as the wilfully wicked: the quieteſt and moſt plauſible offender is ſecretly ſeditious, and ſtirreth quarrels in heaven.

The true meſſengers of God carry authority even where they are maligned; *Elijah* doth at once reprove the king, and require of him the improvement of his power, in gathering all *Iſrael* to *Carmel*, in fetching thither all the prophets of *Baal*. *Baal* was rich in *Iſrael*, while God was poor; while God hath but one hundred prophets hid cloſely in *Obadiah*'s caves, *Baal* hath eight hundred and fifty; four hundred and fifty

diſperſed

diſperſed over the villages and towns of *Iſrael*, four hundred at the court. God's prophets are glad of bread and water, while the four hundred trencher-prophets of *Jezebel* feed on her dainties: they lurk in caves, while theſe lord it in the pleaſanteſt groves. Outward proſperity is a falſe note of truth; all theſe, with all *Iſrael*, doth *Elijah* require *Ahab* to ſummon unto *Carmel*. It is in the power of kings to command the aſſembly of the prophets; the prophet ſues to the prince for the indiction of this ſynod. They are injurious to ſovereignty who arrogate this power to none but ſpiritual hands. How is it, that *Ahab* is as ready to perform this charge, as *Elijah* to move it! I dare anſwer for his heart, that it was not drawn with love: Was it out of the ſenſe of one judgment, and fear of another? He ſmarted with the dearth and drought, and well thinks *Elijah* would not be ſo round with him for nothing. Was it out of an expectation of ſome miraculous exploit which the prophet would do in the ſight of all *Iſrael?* or, was it out of the overruling power of the Almighty? *The heart of kings is in the hands of God, and he turns it which way ſoever he pleaſeth.*

Iſrael is met together, *Elijah* rates them, not ſo much for their ſuperſtition, as for their unſettledneſs and irreſolution. One *Iſraelite* ſerves God, another *Baal*; yea, the ſame *Iſraelite*, perhaps, ſerves both God and *Baal: How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him; but if* Baal, *then follow him.* Nothing is more odious to God than a profane neutrality in main oppoſitions of religion: to go upright in a wrong way, is a leſs eyeſore to God, than to halt betwixt right and wrong. The Spirit wiſhed that the *Laodicean* were either hot or cold; either temper would be better born than neither, than both: in reconcilable differences, nothing is more ſafe than indifferency both of practice

and opinion; but, in caſes of ſo neceſſary hoſtility as betwixt God and *Baal*, he that is on neither ſide is the deadlieſt enemy to both; leſs hateful are they to God that ſerve him not at all, than they that ſerve him with a rival.

Whether out of guiltineſs, or fear, or uncertainty, *Iſrael* is ſilent, yet, while their mouth was ſhut, their eyes were open. It was a fair motion of *Elijah*; *I am only remaining a prophet of the Lord*, Baal's *prophets are four hundred and fifty; let them chuſe one bullock, let me chuſe another; their devotion ſhall be combined, mine ſingle; the God that conſumes the ſacrifice by fire from heaven, let him be God.* *Iſrael* cannot but approve it; the prophets of *Baal* cannot refuſe it; they had the appearance of the advantage, in their number, in the favour of king and people. O ſtrange diſputation, wherein the argument, which muſt be uſed, is fire; the place whence it muſt be fetched, heaven; the mood and figure, devotion; the concluſion, death to be overcome!

Had not *Elijah*, by divine inſtinct, been aſſured of the event, he durſt not have put religion upon ſuch hazard; that God commanded him this trial, who meant confuſion to the authors of idolatry, victory to the truth. His terror ſhall be approved both by fire and by water; firſt by fire, then by water; there was no leſs terror in the fire, than mercy in the rain: it was fit they ſhould be firſt humbled by his terrors, that they might be made capable of his mercy; and, by both, might be won to repentance. Thus ſtill the fears of the law make way for the influences of grace; neither do thoſe ſweet and heavenly dews deſcend upon the ſoul, till way be made for them by the terrible flaſhes of the law.

Juſtly doth *Elijah* urge this trial. God's ſacrifices were uſed to none but heavenly fires; whereas the baſe

baſe and earthly religion of the Heathen contented itſelf with groſs and natural flames.

The prophets of *Baal* durſt not, though with faint and guilty hearts, but embrace the condition; they dreſs their bullock, and lay it ready upon the wood, and ſend out their cries to *Baal* from morning until mid-day; *O* Baal, *hear us*. What a yelling was here of four hundred and fifty throats tearing the ſkies for an anſwer! what leaping was here upon the altar, as if they would have climbed up to fetch that fire which would not come down alone! Mount *Carmel* might give an echo to their voice, heaven gave none; in vain do they roar out, and weary themſelves in imploring a dumb and deaf deity. Grave and auſtere *Elijah* holds it not too light to flout their zealous devotion; he laughs at their tears, and plays upon their earneſt: *Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is purſuing, or he is travelling, or he is ſleeping, and muſt be awaked.*

Scorns and taunts are the beſt anſwers for ſerious idolatry; holineſs will bear us out in diſdainful ſcoffs, and bitterneſs againſt wilful ſuperſtition. No leſs in the indignation at theſe inſulting frumps, than zeal of their own ſafety and reputation, do theſe idolatrous prophets now rend their throats with inclamations, and, that they may aſſure the beholders they were not in jeſt, they cut and ſlaſh themſelves with knives and lancets, and ſolicit the fire with their blood. How much painfulneſs is there in miſ-religion! I do not find that the true God ever required or accepted the ſelf-tortures of his ſervants; he loves true inward mortification of our corruptions, he loves the ſubduing of our ſpiritual inſurrections by due exerciſes of ſevere reſtraint; he takes no pleaſure in our blood, in our carcaſes: they miſtake God that think to pleaſe him by deſtroying that nature which he hath made, and meaſure truth by rigour of outward extremities; *Elijah*

jah drew no blood of himſelf, the prieſts of *Baal* did. How fain would the devil, whom theſe idolaters adored, have anſwered the ſuit of his ſuppliants! What would that ambitious ſpirit have given, that as he was caſt down from heaven like lightning, ſo now he might have fallen down in that form upon his altar!

God forbids it: all the powers of darkneſs can no more ſhew one flaſh of fire in the air, than avoid the unquenchable fire in hell. How eaſy were it for the power of the Almighty to cut ſhort all the tyrannical uſurpations of that wicked one, if his wiſdom and juſtice did not find the permiſſion thereof uſeful to his holy purpoſes.

Theſe idolaters, now towards evening, grew ſo much more vehement, as they were more hopeleſs; and at laſt, when neither their ſhrieks, nor their wounds, nor their mad motions could prevail, they ſit down hoarſe and weary, tormenting themſelves afreſh with their deſpairs, and with the fears of better ſucceſs of their adverſary; when *Elijah* calls the people to him, the witneſſes of his ſincere proceedings, and taking the opportunity, both of the time, the juſt hour of the evening ſacrifice, and of the place, (a ruined altar of God, now by him repaired) convinces *Iſrael* with his miracle, and more cuts theſe *Baalites* with envy, than they had cut themſelves with their lancets.

O holy prophet, why didſt thou not ſave this labour! what needed theſe unſeaſonable reparations! was their not an altar, was there not a ſacrifice ready prepared to thine hand! that, which the prophets of *Baal* had addreſſed, ſtood ſtill waiting for that fire from thee, which the founders threatened in vain: the ſtones were not more impure, either for their touch or for their intentions. Yet ſuch was thy deteſtation of idolatry, that thou abhorredſt to meddle with ought which their wickedneſs had defiled: even that altar, whoſe ruins thou didſt thus repair, was miſ-erected, though

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to the name of the true God; yet didſt thou find it better to make up the breaches of that altar which was miſ-conſecrated to the ſervice of thy God, than to make uſe of that pile which was idolatrouſly devoted to a falſe god. It cannot be but ſafe to keep aloof from participation with idolaters, even in thoſe things, which, not only in nature but in uſe, are unclean.

Elijah lays twelve ſtones in his repaired altar, according to the number of the tribes of the ſons of *Jacob*. Alas! ten of theſe were perverted to *Baal*. The prophet regards not their preſent apoſtaſy, he regards the ancient covenant that was made with their father *Iſrael;* he regards their firſt ſtation, to which he would reduce them: he knew, that the unworthineſs of *Iſrael* could not make God forgetful; he would, by this monument, put *Iſrael* in mind of their own degeneration and forgetfulneſs. He employs thoſe many hands for the making a large trench round about the altar, and cauſes it to be filled with thoſe precious remainders of water which the people would have grudged to their own mouths, neither would eaſily have parted with, but as thoſe that pour down a pailful into a dry pump, in the hope of fetching more. The altar, the trench is full. A barrel-full is poured out for each of the tribes, that every tribe might be afterwards repleniſhed. *Ahab* and *Iſrael* are no leſs full of expectation; and now, when God's appointed hour of the evening ſacrifice was come, *Elijah* comes confidently to his altar, and, looking up into heaven, ſays, *Lord God of* Abraham, Iſaac *and* Iſrael, *let it be known this day, that thou art God in* Iſrael, *and that I am thy ſervant, and that I have done all theſe things at thy word: hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou haſt turned their hearts back again.*

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The *Baalites* prayers were not more tedious than *Elijah*'s was ſhort; and yet more pithy than ſhort, charging God with the care of his covenant, of his truth, of his glory. It was *Elijah* that ſpake loud. O ſtrong cries of faith that pierce the heavens, and irreſiſtibly make their way to the throne of grace! *Iſrael* ſhall well ſee, that *Elijah*'s God, whom they have forſaken, is neither talking, nor purſuing, nor travelling, nor ſleeping. Inſtantly the fire of the Lord falls from heaven and conſumes the burnt-ſacrifice, the wood, the ſtones, the duſt, and licks up the water that was in the trench. With what terror muſt *Ahab* and *Iſrael* needs ſee this fire rolling down out of the ſky, and alighting with ſuch fury ſo near their heads, heads no leſs fit for this flame, than the ſacrifice of *Elijah!* Well might they have thought, how eaſily might this fire have dilated itſelf, and have conſumed our bodies, as well as the wood and ſtone, and have licked up our blood as well as that water! I know not whether they had the grace to acknowledge the mercy of God; they could do no leſs than confeſs his power, *The Lord is God, the Lord is God.*

The iron was now hot with this heavenly fire; *Elijah* ſtays not till it cool again, but ſtrikes immediately: *Take the prophets of* Baal, *let not one of them eſcape.* This wager was for life: had they prevailed in procuring this fire, and *Elijah* failed of effect, his head had been forfeited to them: now, in the contrary ſucceſs, theirs are loſt to him. Let no man complain that thoſe holy hands were bloody: this ſacrifice was no leſs pleaſing to God than that other. Both the man and the act were extraordinary, and led by a peculiar inſtinct: neither doth the prophet this without the aſſent of the ſupreme magiſtrate, who was now ſo affected with this miraculous work, that he could not, in the heat of that conviction, but allow the juſtice of ſuch a ſentence. Far be it from us

to

to accuſe God's commands or executions of cruelty. It was the ancient and peremptory charge of God, that the authors of idolatry and ſeduction ſhould die the death; no eye, no hand might ſpare them. The prophet doth but move the performance of that law, which *Iſrael* could not without ſin have omitted. It is a merciful and thank-worthy ſeverity, to rid the world of the ringleaders of wickedneſs.

CONTEM. VIII. ELIJAH *running before* AHAB, *flying from* JEZEBEL.

I Hear no news of the four hundred prophets of the groves: they ly cloſe under the wing of *Jezebel*, under their pleaſing ſhades, neither will be ſuffered to undergo the danger of this trial: the carcaſes of their fellows help to fill up the half-dry channel of *Kiſhon*. Juſtice is no ſooner done, than *Ahab* hears news of mercy from *Elijah*: *Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a ſound of abundance of rain.* Their meeting was not more harſh than their parting was friendly. It ſeems *Ahab* had ſpent all that day faſting, in an eager attendance of thoſe conflicting prophets. It muſt needs be late ere the execution could be done; *Elijah*'s part began not till the evening. So far muſt the king of *Iſrael* be from taking thought for the maſſacre of thoſe four hundred and fifty *Baalites*, that now *he may go eat his bread with joy, and drink his wine with a cheerful heart:* for God accepteth this work, and teſtifies it in the noiſe of much rain. Every drop of that idolatrous blood was anſwered with a ſhower of rain, with a ſtream of water, and plenty poured down in every ſhower. A ſenſible bleſſing follows the impartial ſtrokes of ſevere juſtice. Nothing is more cruel than an unjuſt pity.

No ears but *Elijah*'s could as yet perceive a ſound of rain; the clouds were not yet gathered, the vapours were not yet riſen, yet *Elijah* hears that which ſhall be. Thoſe that are of God's counſel, can diſcern either favours or judgments afar off. The ſlack apprehenſions of carnal hearts make them hard to believe that as future, which the quick and refined ſenſes of the faithful perceive as preſent.

Ahab goes up to his repaſt, *Elijah* goes up to his prayers. That day had been painful to him, the vehemency of his ſpirit draws him to a neglect of his body. The holy man climbs up to the top of *Carmel*, that now he may talk with his God alone; neither is he ſooner aſcended, than he caſts himſelf down upon the earth. He bows his knees to God, and bows his face down to his knees; by this humble poſture, acknowledging his awful reſpects to that Majeſty which he implored. We cannot proſtrate our bodies or ſouls too low to that infinitely glorious Deity, who is the Creator of both.

His thoughts were more high than his body was low: what he ſaid we know not, we know that what he ſaid opened the heavens, that for three years and an half had been ſhut up. God had ſaid before, *I will ſend rain upon the earth;* yet *Elijah* muſt pray for what God did promiſe. The promiſes of the Almighty do not diſcharge our prayers, but ſuppoſe them; he will do what he undertakes, but we muſt ſue for that which we would have him do. Our petitions are included in the decrees, in the engagements of God.

The prophet had newly ſeen, and cauſed the fire to deſcend immediately out of heaven; he doth not look the water ſhould do ſo; he knew that the rain muſt come from the clouds, and that the clouds muſt ariſe from vapours, and thoſe vapours from the ſea, thence doth he expect them: but, as not willing that the

the thoughts of his fixed devotion ſhould be diſtracted, he doth not go himſelf, only ſends his ſervant to bring him the news of his ſucceſs. At the firſt ſight nothing appears: ſeven times muſt he walk to that proſpect, and not till his laſt view can diſcern ought. All that while is the prophet in his prayers, neither is any whit daunted with that delay. Hope holds up the head of our holy deſires, and perſeverance crowns it. If we receive not an anſwer to our ſuits at the ſixth motion, we may not be out of countenance, but muſt try the ſeventh. At laſt, a little cloud ariſes out of the ſea of an hand-breadth. So many, ſo fervent prayers cannot but pull water out of heaven as well as fire: thoſe ſighs reflect upon the earth, and from the earth reflect upon heaven, from heaven rebound upon the ſea, and raiſe vapours up thence to heaven again. If we find that our prayers are heard for the ſubſtance, we may not cavil at the quantity. Even an hand-broad cloud contents *Elijah*, and fills his heart full of joy and thankfulneſs. He knew well this meteor was not at the biggeſt, it was newly born of the womb of the waters, and in ſome minutes of age muſt grow to a large ſtature: ſtay but a while, and heaven is covered with it. From how ſmall beginnings have great matters ariſen! It is no otherways in all the gracious proceedings of God with the ſoul; ſcarce ſenſible are thoſe firſt works of his ſpirit in the heart, which grow up at laſt to the wonder of men, and applauſe of angels.

Well did *Elijah* know that God, who is perfection itſelf, would not defile his hand with an imperfect and ſcanted favour; as one therefore that foreſaw the face of heaven overſpread with this cloudy ſpot, he ſends to *Ahab* to haſten his chariot, that the rain ſtop him not. It is long ſince *Ahab* feared this let; never was the news of a danger more welcome. Doubtleſs the king of *Iſrael*, while he was at his diet, looked long

for *Elijah*'s promiſed ſhowers; Where is the rain whoſe ſound the prophet heard! how is it that his ears were ſo much quicker than our eyes! we ſaw his fire to our terror, how gladly would we ſee his waters! When now the ſervant of *Elijah* brings him news from heaven, that the clouds were ſetting forward, and, if he haſtened not, would be before him; the wind ariſes, the clouds gather, the ſky thickens; *Ahab* betakes him to his chariot, *Elijah* girds up his loins, and runs before him. Surely the prophet could not want the offer of more eaſe in his paſſage; but he will be for the time *Ahab*'s lackey, that the king, and all *Iſrael* may ſee his humility no leſs than his power, and may confeſs that the glory of thoſe miracles hath not made him inſolent. He knew that his very ſight was monitory; neither could *Ahab*'s mind be beſide the miraculous works of God, while his eye was upon *Elijah;* neither could the king's heart be otherways than well affected towards the prophet, while he ſaw that himſelf, and all *Iſrael*, had received a new life by his procurement. But what news was here for *Jezebel!* Certainly *Ahab* minced nothing of the report of all thoſe aſtoniſhing accidents; if but to ſalve up his own honour, in the death of thoſe *Baalites*, he made the beſt of *Elijah*'s merits; he told of his challenge, conflict, victory, of the fire that fell down from heaven, of the conviction of *Iſrael*, of the unavoidable execution of the prophets, of the prediction and fall of thoſe happy ſhowers, and laſtly of *Elijah*'s officious attendance. Who would not have expected that *Jezebel* ſhould have ſaid, It is no ſtriving, no dallying with the Almighty? No reaſonable creature can doubt, after ſo prodigious a deciſion; God hath won us from heaven, he muſt poſſeſs us; juſtly are our ſeducers periſhed; none but the God that can command fire and water ſhall be ours, there is no prophet but his. But ſhe, contrarily, inſtead of relenting,

lenting, rageth; and ſends a meſſage of death to *Elijah*, *So let the gods do to me, and more alſo, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them, by to-morrow about this time.* Neither ſcourges, nor favours, can work any thing with the obſtinately wicked. All evil hearts are not equally diſaffected to good: *Ahab* and *Jezebel* were both bad enough, yet *Ahab* yields to that work of God, which *Jezebel* ſtubbornly oppoſeth: *Ahab* melts with that water, with that fire, wherewith *Jezebel* is hardened; *Ahab* was baſhfully, *Jezebel* audaciouſly impious. The weaker ſex is ever commonly ſtronger in paſſion, and more vehemently carried with the ſway of their deſires, whether to good or evil: ſhe ſwears and ſtamps at that whereat ſhe ſhould have trembled; ſhe ſwears by thoſe gods of hers, which were not able to ſave their prophets, that ſhe will kill the prophet of God, who had ſcorned her gods, and ſlain her prophets.

It is well that *Jezebel* could not keep counſel: her threat preſerved him whom ſhe had meant to kill. The wiſdom and power of God could have found evaſions for his prophet, in her greateſt ſecrecy; but now, he needs no other means of reſcue but her own lips. She is no leſs vain than the gods ſhe ſwears by. In ſpite of her fury and her oath, and her gods, *Elijah* ſhall live; at once ſhall ſhe find herſelf fruſtrate and forſworn: ſhe is now ready to bite her tongue, to eat her heart, for anger, at the diſappointment of her cruel vow. It were no living for godly men, if the hands of tyrants were allowed to be as bloody as their hearts. Men and devils are under the reſtraint of the Almighty; neither are their deſigns more laviſh, than their executions ſhort.

Holy *Elijah* flies for his life; we hear not of the command of God, but we would willingly preſuppoſe it. So divine a prophet ſhould do dothing without God: his heels were no new refuge; as nowhere ſafe within

within the ten tribes, he flies to *Beerſheba*, in the territories of *Judah;* as not there ſafe from the machinations of *Jezebel*, he flies alone, one day's journey, into the wilderneſs; there he ſits him down under a juniper tree, and, as weary of life no leſs than of his way, wiſhes to riſe no more: *It is enough now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers.* O ſtrange and uncouth mutation! what is this we hear! *Elijah* fainting and giving up! that heroical ſpirit dejected and proſtrate! He that durſt ſay to *Ahab*'s face, *It is thou and thy father's houſe that troubleth* Iſrael; he that could raiſe the dead, open and ſhut the heavens, fetch down both fire and water with his prayers; he that durſt chide and conteſt with all *Iſrael*, that durſt kill the four hundred and fifty *Baalites* with the ſword, doth he ſhrink at the frowns and threats of a woman! doth he wiſh to be rid of his life, becauſe he feared to loſe it! Who can expect an undaunted conſtancy from fleſh and blood, when *Elijah* fails! The ſtrongeſt and holieſt ſaint upon earth is ſubject to ſome qualms of fear and infirmity: to be always and unchangeably good, is proper only to the glorious ſpirits in heaven. Thus the wiſe and holy God will have his power perfected in our weakneſs. It is in vain for us, while we carry this fleſh about us, to hope for ſo exact health, as not to be caſt down ſometimes with fits of ſpiritual diſtemper. It is no new thing for holy men to wiſh for death: who can either marvel at, or blame the deſire of advantage? for the weary traveller to long for reſt, the priſoner for liberty, the baniſhed for home, it is ſo natural, that the contrary diſpoſition were monſtrous. The benefit of the change is a juſt motive to our appetition; but to call for death out of a ſatiety of life, out of an impatience of ſuffering, is a weakneſs unbeſeeming a ſaint. It is not enough, O *Elijah*, God hath more work

work yet for thee; thy God hath more honoured thee, than thy fathers, and thou ſhalt live to honour him.

Toil and ſorrow have lulled the prophet aſleep under this juniper-tree; that wholeſome ſhade was well choſen for his repoſe: while death was called for, the cozen of death comes unbidden; the angel of God waits on him in that hard lodging. No wilderneſs is too ſolitary for the attendance of thoſe bleſſed ſpirits. As he is guarded, ſo is he awaked by that meſſenger of God, and ſtirred up from his reſt to his repaſt: whilé he ſlept, his breakfaſt is made ready for him by thoſe ſpiritual hands; *There was a cake baked on the coals, and a cruſe of water at his head.* O the never-ceaſing care and providence of the Almighty, not to be barred by any place, by any condition! When means are wanting to us, when we are wanting to ourſelves, when to God, even then doth he follow us with his mercy, and caſt favours upon us, beyond, againſt expectation! What variety of purveyance doth he make for his ſervant! One while the ravens, then the *Sareptan*, now the angel ſhall be his caterer; none of them without a miracle: thoſe other provided for him waking, this ſleeping. O God! the eye of thy providence is not dimmer, the hand of thy power is not ſhorter; only teach thou us to ſerve thee, to truſt thee.

Needs muſt the prophet eat, and drink, and ſleep, with much comfort, whíle he ſaw that he had ſuch a guardian, attendance, purveyor; and now the ſecond time is he raiſed, by that happy touch, to his meal, and his way: *Ariſe, and eat, becauſe the journey is too great for thee.* What needed he to travel further, ſince that divine power could as well protect him in the wilderneſs, as in *Horeb?* what needed he to eat, ſince he, that meant to ſuſtain him forty days with one meal, might as well have ſuſtained him without it?

God

God is a moſt free agent, neither will he be tied to the terms of human regularities. It is enough that he knows and approves the reaſons of his own choice and commands: once in forty days and nights ſhall *Elijah* eat, to teach us what God can do with little means; and but once, to teach us what he can do without means. Once ſhall the prophet eat. *Man lives by bread;* and but once, *Man lives not by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Moſes, Elijah*, our Saviour, faſted each of them forty days, and forty nights: the three great faſters met glorioufly in *Tabor*. I find not where God ever honoured any man for feaſting. It is abſtinence, not fulneſs, that makes a man capable of heavenly viſions, of divine glory.

The journey was not of itſelf ſo long; the prophet took thoſe ways, thoſe hours which his heart gave him. In the very ſame mount where *Moſes* firſt ſaw God, ſhall *Elijah* ſee him: one and the ſame cave, as is very probable, was the receptacle to both. It could not be but a great confirmation of *Elijah*, to renew the ſight of thoſe ſenſible monuments of God's favour and protection, to his faithful predeceſſor. *Moſes* came to ſee God in the buſh or *Horeb*. God came to find *Elijah* in the cave of *Horeb*. What doſt thou here, *Elijah?* The place was directed by a Providence, not by a command. He is hid ſure enough from *Jezebel;* he cannot be hid from the all-ſeeing eye of God. *Whither ſhall I go from thy Spirit? or, whither ſhall I fly from thy preſence? If I aſcend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the utmoſt parts of the ſea, even there ſhall thine hand find me, and thy right-hand ſhall hold me.* Twice hath God propounded the ſame queſtion to *Elijah;* once in the heart, once in the mouth of the cave.

cave. Twice doth the prophet anſwer in the ſame words. Had the firſt anſwer ſatisfied, the queſtion had not been re-demanded. Now, that ſullen anſwer, which *Elijah* gave in the darkneſs of the cave, is challenged into the light, not without an awful preface. The Lord firſt paſſeth by him with the terrible demonſtrations of his power. A great and ſtrong wind rent the mountains, and brake the rocks in pieces: that tearing blaſt was from God, God was not in it; ſo was he in it as in his other extraordinary works; not ſo in it, as by it to impart himſelf to *Elijah:* it was the uſher, not the carriage of God. After the wind, came an earthquake more fearful than it: that did but move the air, this the earth; that beat upon ſome prominences of earth, this ſhook it from the centre. After the earthquake, came a fire more fearful than either. The other affected the ear, the feeling; but this lets in horror into the ſoul, by the eye, the quickeſt and moſt apprehenſive of the ſenſes. *Elijah* ſhall ſee God's mighty power in the earth, air, fire, before he hear him in the ſoft voice: all theſe are but boiſterous harbingers of a meek and ſtill word. In that God was; behold! in that gentle and mild breath there was omnipotency; there was but powerfulneſs in thoſe fierce repreſentations: there is not always the greateſt efficacy, where is the greateſt noiſe. God loves to make way for himſelf by terror, but he conveys himſelf to us in ſweetneſs. It is happy for us, if, after the guſts and flaſhes of the law, we have heard the ſoft voice of evangelical mercy.

In this very mount, with the ſame horror, God had delivered his law to *Moſes* and *Iſrael*. It is no marvel, if *Elijah* wrapt his face in his mantle: his obedience draws him forth to the mouth of the cave, his fear ſtill hides his head. Had there not been much courage in the prophet's faith, he had not ſtood out

theſe affrightful forerunners of the divine preſence, though with his face covered. The very angels do no leſs, before that all-glorious Majeſty, than vail themſelves with their wings. Far be it from us, once to think of that infinite and omnipotent Deity, without an humble awfulneſs.

Fear changes not the tenor of *Elijah*'s anſwer: he hath not left one word behind him in the cave. *I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hoſts, becauſe the children of* Iſrael *have forſaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and ſlain thy prophets with the ſword, and I, even I only, am left, and they ſeek my life to take it away.* I hear not a direct anſwer from the prophet to the demand of God; then he had ſaid, I run away from the threats of *Jezebel*, and here I hide my head from her malicious purſuit. His guiltineſs would not let him ſpeak out all: he had rather ſay, *I have been more jealous for the Lord God of hoſts*, then I was fearful of *Jezebel*. We are all willing to make the beſt of our own caſe; but what he wants of his own accuſation, he ſpends upon the complaint of *Iſrael*. Neither doth he more bemoan himſelf, than exclaim againſt them, as apoſtates from God's covenant, violaters of his altars, murderers of his prophets. It muſt needs be a deſperate condition of *Iſrael*, that drives *Elijah* to indict them before the throne of God. That tongue of his was uſed to plead for them, to ſue for their pardon; it could not be but a forcible wickedneſs that makes it their accuſer. Thoſe idolatrous *Iſraelites* were well forward to reformation: the fire and rain from heaven, at the prayers of *Elijah*, had won them to a ſcorn of *Baal;* only the violence of *Jezebel* turned the ſtream, and now they are re-ſettled in impiety, and perſecute him for an enemy, whom they almoſt adored for a benefactor, otherways *Elijah* had not complained of what they had been. Who would

would think it? *Jezebel* can do more than *Elijah*. No miracle is ſo prevalent with the vulgar, as the ſway of authority, whether to good or evil.

Thou art deceived, O *Elijah*, thou art not left alone; neither is all *Iſrael* tainted. God hath children and prophets in *Iſrael*, though thou ſee them not: thoſe clear eyes of the ſeer diſcern not the ſecret ſtore of God; they looked not into *Obadiah*'s caves, they looked not into the cloſets of the religious *Iſraelites*. He, that ſees the heart, can ſay, *I have left me ſeven thouſand in* Iſrael, all the knees which have not bowed to *Baal*, and every mouth which hath not kiſſed him. According to the faſhion of the wealthy, God pleaſeth himſelf in hidden treaſures; it is enough that his own eyes behold his riches. Never did he, never will he leave himſelf unfurniſhed with holy clients, in the midſt of the fouleſt depravations of his church. The ſight of his faithful ones hath ſometimes been loſt, never the being. Do your worſt, O ye gates of hell, God will have his own. He, that could have more, will have ſome: that foundation is ſure, *God knoweth who are his*.

It was a true cordial for *Elijah*'s ſolitarineſs, that he had ſeven thouſand inviſible abettors; neither is it a ſmall comfort to our weakneſs, to have companions in good. For the wickedneſs of *Iſrael* God hath another receipt, the oil of royal and prophetical unction; *Elijah* muſt anoint *Hazael* king of *Syria*, *Jehu* king of *Iſrael*, *Eliſha* for his ſucceſſor. All theſe ſhall revenge the quarrels of God, and him; one ſhall begin, the other ſhall proſecute, the third ſhall perfect the vengeance upon *Iſrael*.

A prophet ſhall avenge the wrongs done to a prophet. *Eliſha* is found, not in his ſtudy, but in the field; not with a book in his hand, but a plough. His father *Shaphat* was a rich farmer in *Abel-meholah*,

himſelf was a good huſbandman, trained up, not in the ſchools of the prophets, but in the thrifty trade of tillage; and behold, this was the man whom God will pick out of all *Iſrael* for a prophet: God ſeeth not as man ſeeth; neither doth he chuſe men becauſe they are fit, but therefore fits them, becauſe he hath choſen them: his call is above all earthly inſtitution.

I hear not of ought that *Elijah* ſaid; only he caſts his cloak upon *Eliſha* in the paſſage: that mantle, that act was vocal. Together with this ſign, God's inſtinct teacheth this amazed ſon of *Shaphat*, that he was deſigned to an higher work, to break up the fallow-ground of *Iſrael* by his prophetical function. He finds a ſtrange virtue in that robe; and, as if his heart were changed with that habit, forgets his team, and runs after *Elijah;* and ſues for the leave of a farewel to his parents, ere he had any but a dumb command to follow. The ſecret call of God offers an inward force to the heart, and inſenſibly draws us beyond the power of our reſiſtance. Grace is no enemy to good nature: well may the reſpects to our earthly parents ſtand with our duties to our Father in heaven. I do not ſee *Eliſha* wring his hands, and deplore his condition that he ſhall leave the world, and follow a prophet, but, for the joy of that change, he makes a feaſt: thoſe oxen, thoſe utenſils of huſbandry, whereon his former labours had been beſtowed, ſhall now be gladly devoted to the celebration of that happy day, wherein he is honoured with ſo bleſſed an employment. If with deſire, if with cheerfulneſs we do not enter into the works of our heavenly Maſter, they are not like to proſper in our hands. He is not worthy of this ſpiritual ſtation, who holds not the ſervice of God his higheſt, his richeſt preferment.

BOOK NINETEENTH.

CONTEM. I. AHAB *and* BENHADAD.

THERE is nothing more dangerous for any ſtate, than to call in foreign powers, for the ſuppreſſing of an home-bred enemy; the remedy hath oft, in this caſe, proved worſe than the diſeaſe. *Aſa* king of *Judah* implores the aid of *Benhadad* the *Syrian*, againſt *Baaſha* king of *Iſrael*. That ſtranger hath good colour to ſet his foot in ſome outſkirt towns of *Iſrael;* and now theſe ſerve him but for the handſel of more. Such ſweetneſs doth that *Edomite* find in the ſoil of *Iſrael*, that his ambition will not take up with leſs than all: he, that entered as a friend, will proceed as a conqueror; and now aims at no leſs than *Samaria* itſelf, the heart, the head of the ten tribes. There was no cauſe to hope for better ſucceſs of ſo perfidious a league with an infidel. Who can look for other than war, when he ſees *Ahab* and *Jezebel* in the throne, *Iſrael* in the groves and temples of *Baalim!* The ambition of *Benhadad* was not ſo much guilty of this war, as the idolatry of that wicked nation. How can they expect peace from earth, who do wilfully fight againſt heaven? Rather will the God of hoſts arm the brute, the ſenſeleſs creatures againſt *Iſrael*, than he will ſuffer their defiance unrevenged. *Ahab* and *Benhadad* are well matched, an idolatrous *Iſraelite* with a paganiſh *Idumean:* well may God plague each with other, who means vengeance to them both. *Ahab* finds himſelf hard preſſed with the ſiege, and therefore is glad to enter into treaties of peace. *Benhadad* knows his own ſtrength, and offers inſolent conditions, *Thy ſilver and thy gold is mine, thy wives alſo and thy children, even the goodlieſt are mine.* It is a fearful thing to be in the mercy of an enemy; in caſe of hoſti-

hoſtility, might will carve for itſelf. *Ahab* now, after the diviſion of *Judah*, was but half a king. *Benhadad* had two and thirty kings to attend him: what equality was in this oppoſition? Wiſely doth *Ahab* therefore, as a reed in a tempeſt, ſtoop to this violent charge of ſo potent an enemy. *My lord, O king, according to thy ſaying, I am thine, and all that I have.* It is not for the over-powered to capitulate. Weakneſs may not argue, but yield. Tyranny is but drawn on by ſubmiſſion; and where it finds fear and dejection, inſulteth. *Benhadad*, not content with the ſovereignty of *Ahab*'s goods, calls for the poſſeſſion: *Ahab* had offered the dominion, with reſervation of his ſubordinate intereſt; he will be a tributary, ſo he may be an owner. *Benhadad* imperiouſly, beſides the command, calls for the propriety, and ſuffers not the king of *Iſrael* to enjoy thoſe things at all, which he would enjoy but under the favour of that predominancy. Over-ſtrained ſubjection turns deſperate. If conditions be impoſed worſe than death, there needs no long diſputation of the remedy. The elders of *Iſrael*, whoſe ſhare was proportional in this danger, hearten *Ahab* to a denial; which yet comes out ſo fearfully, as that it appears rather extorted by the peremptory indignation of the people, than proceeding out of any generoſity of his ſpirit; neither doth he ſay, I will not, but, I may not. The proud *Syrian*, who would have taken it in foul ſcorn to be denied, though he had ſent for all the heads of *Iſrael*, ſnuffs up the wind like the wild aſs in the wilderneſs, and brags, and threats, and ſwears; *The gods do ſo to me, and more alſo, if the duſt of* Samaria *ſhall ſuffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me.* Not the men, not the goods only of *Samaria* ſhall be carried away captive, but the very earth whereon it ſtands; and this, with how much eaſe? No ſoldier ſhall need to be charged

with

with more than an handful, to make a valley where the mother-city of *Iſrael* once ſtood. O vain boaſter! in whom I know not whether pride or folly be more eminent. Victory is to be atchieved, not to be ſworn; future events are no matter of an oath: thy gods, if they had been, might have been called as witneſſes of thy intentions, not of that ſucceſs whereof thou wouldſt be the author without them. Thy gods can do nothing to thee, nothing for thee, nothing for themſelves! All thine *Aramites* ſhall not carry away one corn of ſand out of *Iſrael*, except it be upon the ſoles of their feet, in their ſhameful flight: it is well, if they can carry back thoſe ſkins that they brought thither. *Let not him, that girdeth on his harneſs, boaſt himſelf as he that putteth it off.* There is no cauſe to fear that man that truſts in himſelf. Man may caſt the dice of war, but the diſpoſition of them is of the Lord.

Ahab was lewd, but *Benhadad* was inſolent: if therefore *Ahab* ſhall be ſcourged with the rod of *Benhadad*'s fear, *Benhadad* ſhall be ſmitten with the ſword of *Ahab*'s revenge. Of all things, God will not endure a preſumptuous and ſelf-confident vaunter; after *Elijah*'s flight and complaint, yet a prophet is addreſſed to *Ahab*, *Thus ſaith the Lord, haſt thou ſeen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into thine hand this day, and thou ſhalt know that I am the Lord.* Who can wonder enough at this unweariable mercy of God? After the fire and rain fetched miraculouſly from heaven, *Ahab* had promiſed much, performed nothing, yet again will God bleſs and ſolicit him with victory: one of thoſe prophets, whom he perſecuted to death, ſhall comfort his dejection with the news of his deliverance and triumph. Had this great work been wrought without premonition, either chance, or *Baal*, or the golden calves had carried away the thanks. Before-hand therefore

therefore ſhall *Ahab* know both the author and the means of his victory; God for the author, the two hundred thirty two young men of the princes for the means; what are theſe for the van-guard, and ſeven thouſand *Iſraelites* for the main battle, againſt the troops of three and thirty kings, and as many centuries of *Syrians* as *Iſrael* had ſingle ſoldiers? An equality of number had taken away the wonder of the event; but now, the God of hoſts will be confeſſed in this iſſue, not the valour of men. How indifferent is it with thee, O Lord, to ſave by many or by few, to deſtroy many or few! A world is no more to thee than a man: how eaſy is it for thee to enable us to be more than conquerors over principalities and powers; to ſubdue ſpiritual wickedneſs to fleſh and blood! Through thee we can do great things; yea, we can do all things through thee that ſtrengtheneſt us. Let us not want faith, we are ſure there can be no want in thy power or mercy.

There was nothing in *Benhadad*'s pavilions but drink, and ſurfeit, and jollity, as if wine ſhould make way for blood. Security is the certain uſher of deſtruction. We never have ſo much cauſe to fear, as when we fear nothing. This handful of *Iſrael* dares look out, upon the prophet's aſſurance, to the vaſt hoſt of *Benhadad*. It is enough for that proud Pagan to ſit ſtill, and command amongſt his cups. To defile their fingers with the blood of ſo few, ſeemed no maſtery; that act would be inglorious on the part of the victors: more eaſily might they bring in three heads of dead enemies, than one alive. Imperiouſly enough therefore doth this boaſter, out of his chair of ſtate and eaſe, command, *Whether they be come out for peace, take them alive, or whether they be come out for war, take them alive:* there needs no more, but, *Take them;* this field is won with a word. O the vain and ignorant preſumptions of wretched

ed men that will be reckoning without, againſt their Maker.

Every *Iſraelite* kills his man; the *Syrians* fly, and cannot run away from death: *Benhadad* and his kings are more beholden to their horſes than to their gods, or themſelves, for life and ſafety, elſe they had been either taken or ſlain, by thoſe whom they commanded to be taken.

How eaſy is it for him that made the heart to fill it with terror and conſternation, even where no fear is! Thoſe whom God hath deſtined to ſlaughter, he will ſmite; neither needs he any other enemy or executioner, than what he finds in their own boſom: we are not the maſters of our own courage or fears; both are put into us by that over-ruling power that created us. Stay now, O ſtay, thou great king of *Syria*, and take with thee thoſe forgotten handfuls of the duſt of *Iſrael*; thy gods will do ſo to thee, and more alſo, if thy followers return without their vowed burden. Learn now of the deſpiſed king of *Iſrael*, from henceforth, not to ſound the triumph before the battle, not to boaſt thyſelf in the girding on of thine harneſs, as in the putting off.

I hear not of either the public thankſgiving, or amendment of *Ahab*. Neither danger nor victory can change him from himſelf. *Benhadad* and he, though enemies, agree in unrepentance; the one is no more moved with mercy, than the other with judgment: neither is God any changeling in his proceedings towards both; his judgment ſhall ſtill follow the *Syrian*, his mercy *Iſrael*; mercy, both in forewarning and redelivering *Ahab*; judgment, in overthrowing *Benhadad*. The prophet of God comes again, and both foretels the intended re-encounter of the *Syrian*, and adviſe the care and preparation of *Iſrael*: *Go ſtrengthen thyſelf, and mark, and ſee what thou doſt; for, at the return of the year, the king of* Syria *will come up*

againſt thee. God purpoſeth the deliverance of *Iſrael*, yet may not they neglect their fortifications: the merciful intentions of God towards them may not make them careleſs; the induſtry and courage of the *Iſraelites* fall within the decree of their victory. Security is the bane of good ſucceſs. It is no contemning of a foiled enemy; the ſhame of a former diſgrace and miſcarriage whets his valour, and ſharpens it to revenge. No power is ſo dreadful as that which is recollected from an overthrow.

The hoſtility againſt the *Iſrael* of God may ſleep, but will hardly die. If the *Aramites* ſit ſtill, it is but till they be fully ready for an aſſauſt; time will ſhew that their ceſſation was only for their advantage. Neither is it otherways with our ſpiritual adverſaries; ſometimes their onſets are intermitted; they tempt not always, they always hate us: their forbearance is not out of favour, but attendance of opportunity. Happy are we, if, out of a ſuſpicion of their ſilence, we can as buſily prepare for their reſiſtance, as they do for our impugnation.

As it is a ſhame to be beaten, ſo yet the ſhame is leſs by how much the victor is greater; to mitigate the grief and indignation of *Benhadad*'s foil, his paraſites aſcribe it to gods, not to men; an human power could no more have vanquiſhed him, than a divine power could by him be reſiſted: *their gods are gods of the hills.* Ignorant *Syrians*, that name gods and confine them, varying their deities according to ſituations: they ſaw that *Samaria*, whence they were repelled, ſtood upon the hill of *Shemer;* they ſaw the temple of *Jeruſalem* ſtood upon mount *Sion;* they knew it uſual with the *Iſraelites* to ſacrifice in their high places, and perhaps they had heard of *Elijah*'s altar upon mount *Carmel*, and now they ſottiſhly meaſure the effects of the power by the place of the worſhip, as if he, that was omnipotent on the hill,

was

was impotent in the valley. What doltiſh conceits doth blind paganiſm frame to itſelf of a godhead? as they have many gods, ſo finite; every region, every hill, every dale, every ſtream, hath their ſeveral gods, and each ſo knows his own bounds, that he dares not offer to encroach upon the other; or, if he do, buys it with loſs. Who would think that ſo groſs blockiſhneſs ſhould find harbour in a reaſonable ſoul! A man doth not alter with his ſtation; he, that wreſtled ſtrongly upon the hill, loſeth not his force in the plain; all places find him alike active, alike valourous: yet theſe barbarous *Aramites* ſhame not to imagine that of God, which they would bluſh to affirm of their own champions. Superſtition infatuates the heart out of meaſure; neither is there any fancy ſo abſurd or monſtrous, which credulous infidelity is not ready to entertain with applauſe.

In how high ſcorn doth God take it, to be thus baſely under-valued by rude heathens! This very miſ-opinion concerning the God of *Iſrael* ſhall coſt the *Syrians* a ſhameful and perfect deſtruction; they may call a council of war, and lay their heads together, and change their kings into captains, and the hills into valleys, but they ſhall find more graves in the plains than in the mountains. This very miſpriſon of God ſhall make *Ahab*, though he were more lewd, victorious: an hundred thouſand *Syrians* ſhall fall in one day by thoſe few hands of *Iſrael;* and a dead wall in *Aphek*, to whoſe ſhelter they fled, ſhall revenge God upon the reſt that remained. The ſtones in the wall ſhall rather turn executioners, than a blaſphemous *Aramite* ſhall eſcape unrevenged! So much doth the jealous God hate to be robbed of his glory, even by ignorant Pagans, whoſe tongues might ſeem no ſlander. That proud head of *Benhadad*, that ſpoke ſuch big words of the duſt of *Iſrael*, and ſwore by his gods, that he would kill and conquer, is now glad to hide

itſelf in a blind hole of *Aphek;* and now, inſtead of queſtioning the power of the God of *Iſrael*, is glad to hear the mercy of the kings of *Iſrael; Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the houſe of* Iſrael *are merciful kings; let us, I pray thee, put ſackcloth on our loins, and ropes on our heads, and go out to the king of* Iſrael, *peradventure he will ſave thy life.*

There can be no more powerful attractive of humble ſubmiſſion, than the intimation and conceit of mercy; we do at once fear, and hate the inexorable. This is it, O Lord, that allures us to thy throne of grace, the knowledge of the grace of that throne! with thee is mercy and plenteous redemption: thine hand is open before our mouths, before our hearts. If we did not ſee thee ſmile upon ſuiters, we durſt not preſs to thy footſtool. Behold now, we know that the king of heaven, the God of *Iſrael*, is a merciful God; let us put ſackloth upon our loins, and ſtrew aſhes upon our heads, and go meet the Lord God of *Iſrael*, that he may ſave our ſouls.

How well doth this habit become inſolent and blaſphemous *Benhadad* and his followers, a rope and ſackcloth! a rope for a crown, ſackcloth for a robe! Neither is there leſs change in the tongue, *Thy ſervant* Benhadad *ſaith, I pray thee let me live;* even now the king of *Iſrael* ſaid to *Benhadad, My lord, O king, I am thine; tell my lord the king, all that thou didſt ſend for to thy ſervant, I will do:* Now *Benhadad* ſends to the king of *Iſrael, Thy ſervant* Benhadad *ſaith, I pray thee let me live.* He that was erewhile a lord and king, is now a ſervant; and he that was a ſervant to the king of *Syria*, is now his lord: he that would blow away all *Iſrael* in duſt, is now glad to beg for his own life at the door of a deſpiſed enemy. No courage is ſo haughty, which the

the God of hoſts cannot eaſily bring under; what are men or devils in thoſe Almighty hands!

The greater the dejection was, the ſtronger was the motive of commiſeration; that halter pleaded for life, and that plea, but for a life, ſtirred the bowels for favour. How readily did *Ahab* ſee, in *Benhadad*'s ſudden miſery, the image of the inſtability of all human things, and relents at the view of ſo deep and paſſionate a ſubmiſſion! Had not *Benhadad* ſaid, *Thy ſervant*, *Ahab* had never ſaid, *My brother*: ſeldom ever was there loſs in humility. How much leſs can we fear diſparagement in the annihilating of ourſelves before that infinite Majeſty! The drowning man ſnatches at every twig; it is no marvel if the meſſengers of *Benhadad* catch haſtily at that laſt of grace, and holds it faſt, *Thy brother* Benhadad. Favours are wont to draw on each other; kindneſſes breed on themſelves; neither need we any other perſuaſions to beneficence, than from our own acts. *Ahab* calls for the king of *Syria*, ſets him in his own chariot, treats with him of an eaſy yet firm league, gives him both his life and his kingdom. Neither is the crown of *Syria* ſooner loſt than recovered; only he, that came a free prince, returns tributary; only his train is clipped too ſhort for his wings; an hundred twenty-ſeven thouſand *Syrians* are abated of his guard homeward. Blaſphemy hath eſcaped too well. *Ahab* hath at once peace with *Benhadad*, war with God; God proclaims it by his herald, one of the ſons of the prophets; not yet in his own form, but diſguiſed, both in faſhion and complaint: it was a ſtrange ſuit of a prophet, *Smite me I pray thee*: many a prophet was ſmitten and would not, never any but this wiſhed to be ſmitten. The reſt of his fellows were glad to ſay, *Save me*; this only ſays, *Smite me*. His honeſt neighbour, out of love and reverence, forbears to ſtrike: there are too many, thinks he, that

ſmite

ſmite the prophets, though I refrain; what wrong haſt thou done that I ſhould repay with blows? Hadſt thou ſued for a favour, I could not have denied thee; now thou ſueſt for thine hurt, the denial is a favour. Thus he thought, but charity cannot excuſe diſobedience. Had the man of God called for blows upon his own head, the refuſal had been juſt and thankworthy; but now that he ſays, *In the word of the Lord ſmite me*, this kindneſs is deadly: *Becauſe thou haſt not obeyed the voice of the Lord, behold, as ſoon as thou art departed from me, a lion ſhall ſlay thee.* It is not for us to examine the charges of the Almighty; be they never ſo harſh or improbable, if they be once known for his, there is no way but obedience or death. Not to ſmite a prophet, when God commands, is no leſs ſin than to ſmite a prophet when God forbids. It is the divine precept or prohibition that either makes or aggravates an evil: and if the *Iſraelite* be thus revenged that ſmote not a prophet, what ſhall become of *Ahab* that ſmote not *Benhadad!* Every man is not thus indulgent, an eaſy requeſt will gain blows to a prophet from the next hand, yea, and a wound in ſmiting. I know not whether it were an harder taſk for the prophet to require a wound, than for a well-meaning *Iſraelite* to give it; both muſt be done: the prophet hath what he would, what he muſt will, a ſight of his own blood; and now diſguiſed herewith, and with aſhes upon his face, he waylays the king of *Iſrael*, and ſadly complains of himſelf in a real parable, for diſmiſſing a *Syrian* priſoner delivered to his hands, upon no leſs charge than his life, and ſoon receives ſentence of death from his own mouth; well was that wound beſtowed that ſtruck *Ahab*'s ſoul through the fleſh of the prophet: the diſguiſe is removed, the king ſees not a ſoldier but a ſeer; and now finds that he hath unawares paſſed ſentence upon himſelf. There needs

no

no other doom than from the lips of the offender: *Thus ſaith the Lord, Becauſe thou haſt let go out of thy hand, a man whom I appointed to utter deſtruction, therefore thy life ſhall go for his life, and thy people for his people.* Had not *Ahab* known the will of God concerning *Benhadad*, that had been mercy to an enemy, which was now cruelty to himſelf, to *Iſrael*. His ears had heard of the blaſphemies of that wicked tongue. His eyes had ſeen God go before him, in the example of that revenge. No prince can ſtrike ſo deep into his ſtate, as in not ſtriking: in private favour there may be public unmercifulneſs.

CONTEM. II. AHAB *and* NABOTH.

NABOTH had a fair vineyard; it had been better for him to have had none; his vineyard yielded him the bitter grapes of death. Many a one hath been ſold to death by his lands and goods; wealth hath been a ſnare, as to the ſoul, ſo to the life: why do we call thoſe goods, which are many times the bane of the owner? *Naboth*'s vineyard lay near to the court of *Jezebel;* it had been better for him it had been planted in the wilderneſs. Doubtleſs this vicinity made it more commodious to the poſſeſſor, but more envious and unſafe. It was now the perpetual object of an evil eye, and ſtirred thoſe deſires which could neither be well denied, nor ſatisfied: eminency is ſtill joined with peril, obſcurity with peace. There can be no worſe annoyance to an inheritance, than the greatneſs of an evil neighbourhood. *Naboth*'s vines ſtood too near the ſmoke of *Jezebel*'s chimneys, too much within the proſpect of *Ahab*'s window. Now, lately, had the king of *Iſrael* been twice victorious over the *Syrians;* no ſooner is he returned home, than he is overcome with evil deſires;

deſires; the foil he gave was not worſe than that he took. There is more true glory in the conqueſt of our luſts, than in all bloody trophies. In vain ſhall *Ahab* boaſt of ſubduing a foreign enemy, while he is ſubdued by a domeſtic enemy within his own breaſt: opportunity and convenience is guilty of many a theft. Had not this ground lain ſo fair, *Ahab* had not been tempted; his eye lets in this evil gueſt into the ſoul, which now dares come forth at the mouth: *Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, becauſe it is near to my houſe, and I will give thee a better vineyard for it; or, if it ſeem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money.* Yet had *Ahab* ſo much civility and juſtice, that he would not wring *Naboth*'s patrimony out of his hands by force, but requires it upon a fair compoſition, whether of price, or of exchange. His government was vicious, not tyrannical: propriety of goods was inviolably maintained by him; no leſs was *Naboth* allowed to claim a right in his vineyard, than *Ahab* in his palace. This we owe to lawful ſovereignty to call ought our own; and well worthy is this privilege to be repaid with all humble and loyal reſpects. The motion of *Ahab*, had it been to any other than an *Iſraelite*, had been as juſt, equal, reaſonable, as the repulſe had been rude, churliſh, inhumane. It is fit that princes ſhould receive due ſatisfaction in the juſt demands, not only of their neceſſities, but convenience and pleaſure; well may they challenge this retribution to the benefit of our common peace and protection. If there be any ſweetneſs in our vineyards, any ſtrength in our fields, we may thank their ſcepters; juſtly may they expect from us the commodity, the delight of their habitation; and if we gladly yield to their full elbow-room, both of their ſite and proviſion, we can be no other than ungrateful. Yet dares not *Naboth* give any other anſwer to ſo plauſible a motion,

a motion, than, *The Lord forbid it me, that I ſhould give thee the inheritance of my fathers.* The honeſt *Iſraelite* ſaw violence in this ingenuity: there are no ſtronger commands than the requeſt of the great. It is well that *Ahab* will not wreſt away this patrimony, it is not well that he deſired it; the land was not ſo much ſtood upon as the law. One earth might be as good as another, and money equivalent to either; the Lord had forbidden to alien their inheritance. *Naboth* did not fear loſs, but ſin; what *Naboth* might not lawfully do, *Ahab* might not lawfully require: it pleaſed God to be very punctual and cautelous, both in the diſtinction and preſervation of the entireneſs of theſe *Jewiſh* inheritances. Nothing but extreme neceſſity might warrant a ſale of land, and that but for a time: if not ſooner, yet, at the jubilee, it muſt revert to the firſt owner. It was not without a comfortable ſignification, that whoſoever had once his part in the land of promiſe, could never loſe it. Certainly *Ahab* could not but know this divine reſtriction, yet doubts not to ſay, *Give me thy vineyard.* The unconſcionable will know no other law, but their profit, their pleaſure. A lawleſs greatneſs hates all limitations, and abides not to hear men ſhould need any other warrant but will.

Naboth dares not be thus tractable. How gladly would he be quit of his inheritance, if God would acquit him from the ſin? not out of wilfulneſs, but obedience, doth this faithful *Iſraelite* hold off from this demand of his ſovereign, not daring to pleaſe an earthly king, with offending the heavenly. When princes command lawful things, God commands by them; when unlawful, they command againſt God: paſſive obedience we muſt give, active we may not; we follow them as ſubordinate, not as oppoſite to the higheſt.

Who cannot but ſee and pity the ſtraits of honeſt *Naboth*? *Ahab* requires what God forbids; he muſt fall out either with his God, or his king. Conſcience carries him againſt policy, and he reſolved not to ſin, that he might be gracious: for a world he may not give his vineyard. Thoſe, who are themſelves godleſs, think the holy care of others but idly ſcrupulous. The king of *Iſrael* could not chuſe but ſee, that only God's prohibition lay in the way of his deſigns, not the ſtomach of a froward ſubject; yet he goes away into his houſe heavy and diſpleaſed, and caſts himſelf down upon his bed, turns away his face, and refuſes his meat; he hath taken a ſurfeit of *Naboth*'s grapes which mars his appetite, and threats his life. How ill can great hearts endure to be croſſed, though upon the moſt reaſonable and juſt grounds. *Ahab*'s place called him to the guardianſhip of God's law; and now his heart is ready to break, that this parcel of that law may not be broken. No marvel if he made not dainty to tranſgreſs a local ſtatute of God, who did ſo ſhamefully violate the eternal law of both tables.

I know not whether the ſpleen, or the gall of *Ahab* be more affected; whether more of anger or grief, I cannot ſay; but ſick he is, and keeps his bed, and balks his meat, as if he ſhould die of no other death, than the ſalads that he would have had. O the impotent paſſion, and inſatiable deſires of covetouſneſs! *Ahab* is lord and king of all the territories of *Iſrael*, *Naboth* is the owner of one poor vineyard; *Ahab* cannot enjoy *Iſrael*, if *Naboth* enjoy his vineyard. Beſides *Samaria*, *Ahab* was the great lord paramount of *Damaſcus* and all *Syria*, the victor of him that was attended with two and thirty kings. *Naboth* was a plain townſman of *Jezreel*, the good huſband of a little vineyard. Whether is the wealthier? I do not hear *Naboth* wiſh for any thing of *Ahab*'s; I hear *Ahab* wiſhing, not without indignation of a repulſe,

repulſe, for ſomewhat from *Naboth*. Riches and poverty is no more in the heart than in the hand: he is wealthy that is contented: he is poor that wanteth more. O rich *Naboth*, that careſt not for all the large poſſeſſions of *Ahab*, ſo thou mayeſt be the lord of thine own vineyard! O miſerable *Ahab*, that careſt not for thine own poſſeſſions, while thou mayeſt not be the lord of *Naboth*'s vineyard!

He, that cauſed the diſeaſe, ſends him a phyſician. Satan knew of old how to make uſe of ſuch helpers. *Jezebel* comes to *Ahab*'s bed-ſide, and caſts cold water in his face, and puts into him ſpirits of her own extracting: *Doſt thou now govern the kingdom of* Iſrael? *Ariſe, eat bread, and let thine heart be merry, I will give thee the vineyard of* Naboth. *Ahab* wanted neither wit nor wickedneſs; yet is he in both a very novice to this *Sidonian* dame. There needs no other devil than *Jezebel*, whether to project evil, or to work it. She chides the puſillanimity of her dejected huſband, and perſuades him his rule cannot be free, unleſs it be licentious; that there ſhould be no bounds for ſovereignty, but will. Already hath ſhe contrived to have, by fraud and force, what was denied to entreaty. Nothing needs but the name, but the ſeal of *Ahab*; let her alone with the reſt. How preſent are the wits of the weaker ſex for the deviſing of wickedneſs! ſhe frames a letter in *Ahab*'s name to the ſenators of *Jezreel*, wherein ſhe requires them to proclaim a faſt, to ſuborn two falſe witneſſes againſt *Naboth*, to charge him with blaſphemy againſt God and the king, to ſtone him to death; a ready payment for a rich vineyard. Whoſe indignation riſeth not, to hear *Jezebel* name a faſt! The great contemners of the moſt important laws of God, yet can be content to make uſe of ſome divine both ſtatutes and cuſtoms, for their own advantage. She knew the *Iſraelites* had ſo much remainder of grace,

as to hold blaſphemy worthy of death: ſhe knew their manner was to expiate thoſe crying ſins with public humiliation; ſhe knew that two witneſſes at leaſt muſt caſt the offender: all theſe ſhe urges to her own purpoſe. There is no miſchief ſo deviliſh, as that which is cloaked with piety. Simulation of holineſs doubleth a villany. This murder had not been half ſo foul, if it had not been thus maſked with a religious obſervation. Beſides devotion, what a fair pretence of legality is here! blaſphemy againſt God and his anointed may not paſs unrevenged. The offender is convented before the ſad and ſevere bench of magiſtracy; the juſtice of *Iſrael* allows not to condemn an abſent, an unheard malefactor. Witneſſes come forth, and agree in the intentation of the crime; the judges rend their garments, and ſtrike their breaſts as grieved, not more for the ſin than the puniſhment: their very countenance muſt ſay, *Naboth* ſhould not die, if his offence did not force our juſtice; and now, he is no good ſubject, no true *Iſraelite*, that hath not a ſtone for *Naboth*.

Jezebel knew well to whom ſhe wrote. Had not thoſe letters fallen upon the times of a woful degeneration of *Iſrael*, they had received no leſs ſtrong denials from the elders, than *Ahab* had from *Naboth*. *God forbid, that the ſenate of* Jezreel *ſhould forge a perjury, belie truth, condemn innocency, bruik corruption.* Command juſt things, we are ready to die in the zeal of our obedience, we dare not imbrue our hands in the blood of an innocent.

But ſhe knew whom ſhe had engaged, whom ſhe had marred, by making conſcious. It were ſtrange, if they, who can countenance evil with greatneſs, ſhould want factors for the unjuſteſt deſigns. Miſerable is that people, whoſe rulers, inſtead of puniſhing, plot and encourage wickedneſs; when a diſtillation of evil falls from the head, upon the lungs of any

any ſtate, there muſt needs follow a deadly conſumption.

Yet perhaps there wanted not ſome colour of pretence for this proceeding; they could not but hear, that ſome words had paſſed betwixt the king and *Naboth:* haply it was ſuggeſted, that *Naboth* had ſecretly over-laſhed into ſaucy and contemptuous terms to his ſovereign, ſuch as neither might be well born, nor yet, by reaſon of their privacy, legally convinced. The bench of *Jezreel* ſhould but ſupply a form to the juſt matter and deſert of condemnation; what was it for them to give their hand to this obſcure midwifery of juſtice? it is enough that their king is an accuſer and witneſs of that wrong, which only their ſentence can formally revenge. All this cannot waſh their hands from the guilt of blood; if juſtice be blind, in reſpect of partiality, ſhe may not be blind in reſpect of the grounds of execution. Had *Naboth* been a blaſphemer, or a traitor, yet theſe men were no better than murderers. What difference is there betwixt the ſtroke of magiſtracy, and of man-ſlaughter, but due conviction?

Wickedneſs never ſpake out of a throne, and complained of the defect of inſtruments. *Naboth* was, it ſeems, ſtrictly conſcionable, his fellow-citizens looſe and lawleſs; they are glad to have gotten ſuch an opportunity of diſpatch. No clauſe of *Ahab*'s letter is not obſerved; a faſt is warned, the city is aſſembled, *Naboth* is convented, accuſed, confronted, ſentenced, ſtoned. His vineyard is eſcheated to the crown; *Ahab* takes ſpeedy and quiet poſſeſſion. How ſtill doth God ſit in heaven, and look upon the complots of treachery and villanies, as if they did not concern him! The ſucceſs ſo anſwers their deſires, as if both heaven and earth were their friends. It is the plague, which ſeems the felicity of ſinners, to ſpeed well in their lewd enterpriſes: no reckoning

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is brought in the midſt of the meal, the end pays for all. While *Ahab* is rejoicing in his new garden-plot, and promiſing himſelf contentment in this commodious enlargement, in comes *Elijah*, ſent from God, with an errand of vengeance. Methinks I ſee how the king's countenance changed, with what aghaſt eyes and pale cheeks he looked upon that unwelcome prophet. Little pleaſure took he in his proſpect, while it was clogged with ſuch a gueſt; yet his tongue begins firſt, *Haſt thou found me, O mine enemy?* Great is the power of conſcience. Upon the laſt meeting, for ought we know, *Ahab* and *Elijah* parted friends. The prophet had lackeyed his coach, and took a peaceable leave at this town's end; now *Ahab*'s heart told him (neither needed any other meſſenger) that God and his prophet were fallen out with him: his continuing idolatry, now ſeconded with blood, bids him look for nothing but frowns from heaven. A guilty heart can never be at peace. Had not *Ahab* known how ill he had deſerved of God, he had never ſaluted his prophet by the name of an enemy; he had never been troubled to be found by *Elijah*, if his own breaſt had not found him out for an enemy to God. Much good may thy vineyard do thee, O thou king of *Iſrael;* many fair flowers, and ſavoury herbs may thy new garden yield thee; pleaſe thyſelf with thy *Jezebel*, in the triumph over the carcaſe of a ſcrupulous ſubject; let me rather die with *Naboth*, than rejoice with thee: his turn is over, thine is to come. The ſtones that overwhelmed innocent *Naboth*, were nothing to thoſe that ſmite thee, *Haſt thou killed, and alſo taken poſſeſſion? Thus ſaith the Lord, in the place where dogs licked the blood of* Naboth, *ſhall dogs lick thy blood, even thine.* What meaneſt thou, O *Elijah*, to charge this murder upon *Ahab?* he kept his chamber, *Jezebel* wrote, the elders condemned, the people ſtoned; yet thou ſayſt,

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Haſt thou killed? Well did *Ahab* know, that *Jezebel* could not give this vineyard with dry hands; yet was he content to wink at what ſhe would do: he but ſits ſtill while *Jezebel* works, only his ſignet is ſuffered to walk for the ſealing of this unknown purchaſe. Thoſe, that are truſted with authority, may offend no leſs in connivency or neglect, than others in act, in participation: not only command, conſent, countenance, but very permiſſion feoffs public perſons in thoſe ſins, which they might, and will not prevent. God loves to puniſh by retaliation; *Naboth* and *Ahab* ſhall both bleed; *Naboth* by the ſtones of the *Jezreelites*, *Ahab* by the ſhafts of the *Aramites;* the dogs ſhall taſte of the blood of both. What *Ahab* hath done in cruelty, he ſhall ſuffer in juſtice; the caſe and the end make the difference happy on *Naboth*'s ſide, on *Ahab*'s woful; *Naboth* bleeds as a martyr, *Ahab* as a murderer. Whatever is *Ahab*'s condition, *Naboth* changes a vineyard on earth, for a kingdom in heaven. Never any wicked man gained by the perſecution of an innocent; never any innocent man was a loſer by ſuffering from the wicked.

Neither was this judgment perſonal, but hereditary; *I will take away thy poſterity, and will make thine houſe like the houſe of* Jeroboam. Him that dieth of *Ahab* in the city, *the dogs ſhall eat;* and him that dieth in the field, *ſhall the fowls of the air eat. Ahab* ſhall not need to take thought for the traducing of this ill-gotten inheritance; God hath taken order for his heirs, whom his ſin hath made no leſs the heirs of his curſe, than of his body. Their father's cruelty to *Naboth*, hath made them, together with their mother *Jezebel*, dogs meat. The revenge of God doth at laſt make amends for the delay. Whether now is *Naboth*'s vineyard paid for?

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The man that had ſold himſelf to work wickedneſs, yet rues the bargain. I do not hear *Ahab*, as bad as he was, revile or threaten the prophet, but he rends his clothes, and wears and lies in ſackcloth, and faſts, and walks ſoftly. Who that had ſeen *Ahab* would not have deemed him a true penitent? All this was the vizard of ſorrow, not the face; or if the face, not the heart; or if the ſorrow of the heart, yet not the repentance; a ſorrow for the judgment, not a repentance for the ſin. The very devils howl to be tormented. Grief is not ever a ſign of grace. *Ahab* rends his clothes, he did not rend his heart; he puts on ſackcloth, not amendment; he lies in ſackcloth, but he lies in his idolatry; he walks ſoftly, he walks not ſincerely. Worldly ſorrow cauſeth death; happy is that grief for which the ſoul is the holier.

Yet what is this I ſee? this very ſhadow of penitence carries away mercy. It is no ſmall mercy to defer an evil; even *Ahab*'s humiliation ſhall prorogue the judgment: ſuch as the penitence was, ſuch ſhall be the reward; a temporary reward of a temporary penitence. As *Ahab* might be thus ſorrowful, and never the better; ſo he may be thus favoured, and never the happier. O God, how graciouſly art thou ready to reward a ſound and holy repentance, who art thus indulgent to a carnal and ſervile dejection.

CONTEM. III. AHAB *and* MICAIAH: *or, The death of* AHAB.

WHO would have looked to have heard any more of the wars of the *Syrians* with *Iſrael*, after ſo great a ſlaughter, after ſo firm a league; a league not of peace only, but of brotherhood; the halters, the ſackcloth of *Benhadad*'s followers were worn out, as of uſe, ſo of memory, and now they are changed for iron and ſteel. It is but three years that

that this peace laſts; and now that war begins which ſhall make an end of *Ahab*. The king of *Iſrael* rules his unjuſt mercy: according to the word of the prophet, that gift of a life was but an exchange; becauſe *Ahab* gave *Benhadad* his life, *Benhadad* ſhall take *Ahab*'s; he muſt forfeit in himſelf what he hath given to another. There can be no better fruit of too much kindneſs to infidels. It was one article of the league betwixt *Ahab* and his brother *Benhadad*, that there ſhould be a ſpeedy reſtitution of all the *Iſraelitiſh* cities; the reſt are yielded, only *Ramoth-Gilead* is held back, unthankfully, injuriouſly. He that begged but his life, receives his kingdom, and now reſts not content with his own bounds. Juſtly doth *Ahab* challenge his own, juſtly doth he move a war to recover his own from a perfidious tributary: the lawfulneſs of actions may not be judged by the events, but by the grounds. The wiſe and holy Arbiter of the world knows why, many times, the better cauſe hath the worſt ſucceſs. Many a juſt buſineſs is croſſed, for a puniſhment to the agent.

Yet *Iſrael* and *Judah* were now pieced in friendſhip. *Jehoſaphat*, the good king of *Judah*, had made affinity with *Ahab* the idolatrous king of *Iſrael*; and, beſides a perſonal viſitation, joins his forces with his new kinſman, againſt an old confederate. *Judah* had called in *Syria* againſt *Iſrael*; and now *Iſrael* calls in *Judah* againſt *Syria*: thus rather ſhould it be, It is fit that the more pure church ſhould join with the more corrupt, againſt a common paganiſh enemy.

Jehoſaphat hath matched with *Ahab*; not with a divorce of his devotion. He will fight, not without God; *Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord to day.* Had he done thus ſooner, I fear, *Athaliah* had never called him father: this motion was news in *Iſrael*. It was wont to be ſaid, Inquire of *Baal*. The good king of *Judah* will bring religion

into faſhion in the court of *Iſrael*. *Ahab* had inquired of his counſellor; what needed he be ſo devout, as to inquire of his prophets? Only *Jehoſaphat*'s preſence made him thus godly. It is an happy thing to converſe with the virtuous; their counſel and example cannot but leave ſome tincture behind them of a good profeſſion, if not of piety. Thoſe that are truly religious dare not but take God with them in all their affairs; with him they can be as valiant, as timorous without him.

Ahab had clergy enough, ſuch as it was; four hundred prophets of the groves were reſerved from appearing to *Elijah*'s challenge: Theſe are now conſulted by *Ahab;* they live to betray the life of him who ſaved theirs. Theſe care not ſo much to inquire what God would ſay, as what *Ahab* would have them ſay; they ſaw which way the king's heart was bent, that way they bent their tongues; *Go up, for the Lord ſhall deliver it into the hands of the king.* Falſe prophets care only to pleaſe; a plauſible falſhood paſſes with them above an harſh truth. Had they ſeen *Ahab* fearful, they had ſaid, *Peace, peace;* now, they ſee him reſolute, War and victory. It is a fearful preſage of ruin, when the prophets conſpire in aſſentation.

Their number conſent; confidence hath eaſily won credit with *Ahab;* we do all willingly believe what we wiſh. *Jehoſaphat* is not ſo ſoon ſatisfied; theſe prophets were, it is like, obtruded to him (a ſtranger) for the true prophets of the true God. The judicious king ſees cauſe to ſuſpect them, and now, perceiving at what altars they ſerved, hates to reſt in their teſtimony; *Is there not here a prophet of the Lord beſides, that we might inquire of him?* One ſingle prophet, ſpeaking from the oracles of God, is more worth than four hundred *Baalites:* truth may not ever be meaſured by the poll. It is not number,

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but weight that muſt carry it in a council of prophets. A ſolid verity in one mouth is worthy to preponderate light falſhood in a thouſand.

Even king *Ahab*, as bad as he was, kept tale of his prophets, and could give account of one that was miſſing; *There is yet one man,* Micaiah *the ſon of* Imlah, *by whom we may inquire of the Lord; but I hate him, for he doth not propheſy good concerning me, but evil.* It is very probable that *Micaiah* was that diſguiſed prophet, who brought to *Ahab* the fearful meſſage of diſpleaſure, and death for diſmiſſing *Benhadad*, for which he was ever ſince faſt in priſon, deep in diſgrace. O corrupt heart of ſelf-condemned *Ahab!* If *Micaiah* ſpake true to thee, how was it evil? If others ſaid falſe, how was it good? And if *Micaiah* ſpake from the Lord, why doſt thou hate him? This hath wont to be the ancient lot of truth, cenſure and hatred; cenſure of the meſſage, hatred of the bearer. To carnal ears the meſſage is evil, if unpleaſing; and, if plauſible, good; if it be ſweet, it cannot be poiſon: if bitter, it cannot be wholſome. The diſtemper of the receiver is guilty of this miſconceit: in itſelf, every truth, as it is good, ſo amiable; every falſhood loathſome, as evil. A ſick palate cries out of the taſte of thoſe liquors which are well allowed of the healthful. It is a ſign of a good ſtate of the ſoul, when every verdure can receive his proper judgment.

Wiſe and good *Jehoſaphat* diſſuades *Ahab* from ſo hard an opinion, and ſees cauſe ſo much more to urge the conſultation of *Micaiah*, by how much he finds him more unpleaſing. The king of *Iſrael*, to ſatisfy the importunity of ſo great and dear an ally, ſends an officer for *Micaiah:* he knew well, belike, where to find him; within thoſe four walls, where unjuſt cruelty had diſpoſed of that innocent ſeer; out of the obſcurity of the priſon, is the poor pro-

phet fetcht in the light of ſo glorious a confeſſion of two kings, who thought this convocation of prophets not unworthy of their greateſt repreſentation of ſtate and majeſty: there he finds *Zedekiah*, the leader of that falſe crew, not ſpeaking only, but acting his prediction. Signs were no leſs uſed by the prophets, than words; this arch-flatterer hath made him horns of iron; the horn is forcible, the iron irreſiſtible; by an irreſiſtible force ſhall *Ahab* puſh the *Syrians*, as if there were more certainty in this man's hands, than in his tongue. If this ſon of *Chenaanah*, had not had a forehead of braſs for impudency, and a heart of lead for flexibleneſs to humours and times, he had never deviſed theſe horns of iron wherewith his king was gored unto blood. However, it is enough for him that he is believed, that he is ſeconded. All this great inqueſt of theſe prophets gave up their verdict to this foreman; not one of four hundred diſſented. Unanimity of opinion in the greateſt eccleſiaſtical aſſemblies, is not ever an argument of truth; there may be as common, and as firm agreement in error.

The meſſenger, that came for *Micaiah*, like a carnal friend, ſets him in a way of favour; tells him what the reſt had ſaid, how they pleaſed; how unſafe it would be for him to vary, how beneficial to aſſent. Thoſe that adore earthly greatneſs think every man ſhould dote upon their idols, and hold no terms too high for their ambitious purchaſes. Faithful *Micaiah* ſcorns the motion; he knows the price of the word, and contemns it; *As the Lord liveth, what the Lord ſaith unto me, that will I ſpeak.* Neither fears, nor favours, can tempt the holily reſolute: they can trample upon dangers, or honours, with a careleſs foot; and, whether they be ſmiled or frowned on by the great, dare not either alter or conceal their errand.

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The queſtion is moved to *Micaiah:* he at firſt yields, then he contradicts; yields in words, contradicts in pronunciation; the ſyllables are for them, the ſound againſt them: ironies deny ſtrongeſt in affirming. And now, being preſſed home, he tells them, that God had ſhewed him thoſe ſheep of *Iſrael* ſhould, ere long, by this means, want their ſhepherd. The very reſemblance, to a good prince, had been affective: the ſheep is an helpleſs creature, not able either to guard or guide itſelf; all the ſafety, all the direction of it, is from the keeper, without whom every cur chaſes and worries it, every track ſeduceth it; ſuch ſhall *Iſrael* ſoon be, if *Ahab* be ruled by his prophets. The king of *Iſrael* doth not believe, but quarrel; not at himſelf, who had deſerved evil, but at the prophet, who foreſignified it; and is more careful that the king of *Judah* ſhould mark how true he had foretold concerning the prophet, than how the prophet had foretold concerning him.

Bold *Micaiah*, as no whit diſcouraged with the unjuſt checks of greatneſs, doubles his prediction, and, by a ſecond viſion, particularizeth the means of this dangerous error. Whiles the two kings ſat majeſtically in their thrones, he tells them of a more glorious throne than theirs, whereon he ſaw the King of gods ſitting: while they were compaſſed with ſome hundreds of prophets, and thouſands of ſubjects, and ſoldiers, he tells them of all the hoſt of heaven, attending that other throne; while they were deliberating of a war, he tells them of a God of heaven juſtly decreeing the judgment of a deadly deception to *Ahab*. The decree of the higheſt, is not more plainly revealed, than expreſſed parabolically. The wiſe and holy God is repreſented, after the manner of men, conſulting of that ruin which he intended to the wicked king of *Iſrael*. That uncreated,

created and infinite Wiſdom needs not the advice of any finite and created powers to direct him, needs not the aſſent nor aid of any ſpirit for his execution, much leſs of an evil one; yet, here an evil ſpirit is brought in, by way of viſion mixt with parable, proffering the ſervice of his lie, accepted, employed, ſucceſsful. Theſe figures are not void of truth: the action and event is reduced to a decree; the decree is ſhadowed out by the reſemblance of human proceedings. All evil motions, and counſels, are originally from that malignant ſpirit; that evil ſpirit could have no power over men, but by the permiſſion, by the decree of the Almighty. That Almighty, as he is no author of ſin, ſo he ordains all evil to good: it is good that is juſt; it is juſt that one ſin ſhould be puniſhed by another: Satan is herein no other than the executioner of that God, who is as far from infuſing evil, as from not revenging it. Now *Ahab* ſees the ground of that applauded conſent of his rabble of prophets; one evil ſpirit hath no leſs deceived them, than they their maſter: he is one, therefore he agrees with himſelf; he is evil, therefore both he and they agree in deceit.

O! the noble and undaunted ſpirit of *Micaiah*; neither the thrones of the kings, nor the number of the prophets, could abate one word of his true, though diſpleaſing, meſſage: the king of *Iſrael* ſhall hear, that he is miſled by liars, they by a devil. Surely *Jehoſaphat* cannot but wonder at ſo unequal a contention, to ſee one ſilly prophet affronting four hundred; with whom, leſt confidence ſhould carry it, behold *Zedekiah*, more bold, more zealous: if *Micaiah* have given him, with his fellows, the lie, he gives *Micaiah* the fiſt. Before theſe two great guardians of peace and juſtice, ſwaggering *Zedekiah* ſmites *Micaiah* on the face; and with the blow expoſtulates; *Which way went the ſpirit of the Lord*

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from me, to ſpeak unto thee? For a prophet to ſmite a prophet, in the face of two kings, was intolerably inſolent: the act was much unbeſeeming the perſon, more the preſence; prophets may reprove, they may not ſtrike. It was enough for *Ahab* to puniſh with the hand; no weapon was for *Zedekiah*, but his tongue; neither could this rude preſumption have been well taken, if malice had not made magiſtracy inſenſible of this uſurpation. *Ahab* was well content to ſee that hated mouth beaten by any hand. It is no new condition of God's faithful meſſengers to ſmart for ſaying truth. Falſhood doth not more bewray itſelf in any thing than in blows; truth ſuffers, while error perſecutes. None are more ready to boaſt of the Spirit of God, than thoſe that have the leaſt; as in veſſels, the full are ſilent.

Innocent *Micaiah* neither defends nor complains: it would have well beſeemed the religious king of *Judah* to have ſpoken in the cauſe of the dumb, to have checked inſolent *Zedekiah*. He is content to give way to this tide of peremptory and general oppoſition: the helpleſs prophet ſtands alone, yet lays about him with his tongue; *Behold thou ſhalt ſee, in that day when thou ſhalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyſelf.* Now the proud *Baalite* ſhewed himſelf too much, ere long he ſhall be glad to lurk unſeen; his horns of iron cannot bear off his danger. The ſon of *Ahab* cannot chuſe, but, in the zeal of revenging his father's deadly ſeducement, call for that falſe head of *Zedekiah;* in vain ſhall that impoſtor ſeek to hide himſelf from juſtice; but, in the mean while, he goes away with honour, *Micaiah* with cenſure: *Take* Micaiah, *and carry him back to* Ammon *the governor of the city, and to* Joaſh *the king's ſon; and ſay, Thus ſaith the king, put this fellow in priſon, and feed him with bread of affliction, and with water of affliction, until I come in peace.*

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An hard doom of truth; the jail for his lodging, coarſe bread and water for his food, ſhall but reſerve *Micaiah* for a further revenge: the return of *Ahab* ſhall be the bane of the prophet. Was not this he that adviſed *Benhadad* not to boaſt in the putting on his armour, as in the ungirding it; and doth he now promiſe himſelf peace and victory, before he buckle it on! No warning will diſſuade the wilful; ſo aſſured doth *Ahab* make himſelf of ſucceſs, that he threatens ere he go, what he will do when he returns in peace. How juſtly doth God deride the miſreckonings of proud and fooliſh men; if *Ahab* had no other ſins, his very confidence ſhall defeat him, yet the prophet cannot be overcome in his reſolution; he knows his grounds cannot deceive him, and dares therefore caſt the credit of his function upon this iſſue: *If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not ſpoken by me:* and he ſaid, *Hearken, O people every one of you.* Let him never be called a prophet that dare not truſt his God. This was no adventure therefore of reputation or life; ſince he knew whom he believed, the event was no leſs ſure than if it had been paſt. He is no god that is not conſtant to himſelf: hath he ſpoken, and ſhall he not perform? what hold have we for our ſouls, but his eternal word? The being of God is not more ſure than his promiſes, than his ſentences of judgment. Well may we appeal the teſtimony of the world in both: if there be not plagues for the wicked, if there be not rewards for the righteous, God hath not ſpoken by us.

Not *Ahab* only, but good *Jehoſaphat* is carried with the multitude; their forces are joined againſt *Ramoth*. The king of *Iſrael* doth not ſo truſt his prophets, that he dares truſt himſelf in his own clothes: thus ſhall he elude *Micaiah*'s threat; I wiſh the judgment of God, the *Syrian* ſhafts, cannot find him out in this unſuſpected diſguiſe. How fondly do vain men

men imagine to ſhift off the juſt revenges of the Almighty!

The king of *Syria* gives charge to his captains to fight againſt none but the king of *Iſrael*. Thus doth the unthankful infidel repay the mercy of his late victor; ill was the ſnake ſaved, that requites the favour of his life with a ſting: thus ſtill the greateſt are the faireſt mark to envious eyes. By how much more eminent any man is in the *Iſrael* of God, ſo many more, and more dangerous enemies muſt he expect; both earth and hell conſpire in their oppoſition to the worthieſt. Thoſe, who are advanced above others, have ſo much more need of the guard both of their own vigilancy, and others prayers. *Jehoſaphat* had like to have paid dear for his love: he is purſued for him, in whoſe amity he offended; his cries deliver him, his cries, not to his purſuers, but to his God; whoſe mercy takes not advantage of our infirmity, but reſcues us from thoſe evils which we wilfully provoke. It is *Ahab*, againſt whom, not the *Syrians* only, but God himſelf intends this quarrel; the enemy is taken off from *Jehoſaphat*. O the juſt and mighty hand of that divine Providence, which directeth all our actions to his own ends, which takes order where every ſhaft ſhall light, and guides the arrow of the ſtrong archer into the joints of *Ahab*'s harneſs! it was ſhot at a venture, falls by a deſtiny; and there falls, where it may carry death to an hidden debtor. In all actions, both voluntary and caſual, thy will, O God, ſhall be done by us, with whatever intentions. Little did the *Syrian* know whom he had ſtricken, no more than the arrow wherewith he ſtruck: an inviſible hand diſpoſeth of both, to the puniſhment of *Ahab*, to the vindication of *Micaiah*. How worthily, O God, art thou to be adored in thy juſtice and wiſdom, to be feared in thy judgments! Too late doth *Ahab* now think of the fair warnings of *Micaiah*, which he

unwiſely contemned; of the painful flatteries of *Zedekiah*, which he ſtubbornly believed: that guilty blood of his runs down, out of his wound, into the midſt of his chariot, and pays *Naboth* his arrearages. O *Ahab*, what art thou the better for thine ivory houſe, while thou haſt a black ſoul! what comfort haſt thou now in thoſe flattering prophets, which tickled thine ears, and ſecured thee of victories! what joy is it to thee now, that thou waſt great! Who had not rather be a *Micaiah* in the jail, than *Ahab* in the chariot! Wicked men have the advantage of the way, godly men of the end. The chariot is waſhed in the pool of *Samaria*, the dogs come to claim their due; they lick up the blood of the great king of *Iſrael*. The tongues of thoſe brute creatures ſhall make good the tongue of God's prophet: *Micaiah* is juſtified, *Naboth* is revenged, the *Baalites* confounded, *Ahab* judged. *Righteous art thou, O God, in all thy ways, and holy in all thy works!*

CONTEM. IV. AHAZIAH *ſick, and* ELIJAH *revenged.*

AHAZIAH ſucceeded his father *Ahab*, both in his throne and in his ſin. Who could look for better iſſue of thoſe loins, of thoſe examples? God follows him with a double judgment, of the revolt of *Moab*, and of his own ſickneſs. All the reign of *Ahab*, had *Moab* been a quiet tributary, and furniſhed *Iſrael* with rich flocks and fleeces; now their ſubjection dies with that warlike king, and will not be inherited. This rebellion took advantage, as from the weaker ſpirits, ſo from the ſickly body of *Ahaziah*, whoſe diſeaſe was not natural, but caſual: walking in his palace of *Samaria*, ſome grate in the floor of his chamber breaks under him, and gives way to that fall, whereby he is bruiſed, and languiſheth. The

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ſame hand, that guided *Ahab*'s ſhaft, cracks *Ahaziah*'s lattice. How infinite variety of plagues hath the juſt God for obſtinate ſinners! whether in the field or in the chamber, he knows to find them out. How fearleſly did *Ahaziah* walk on his wonted pavement! The Lord hath laid a trap for him, whereinto, while he thinks leaſt, he falls irrecoverably. No place is ſafe for the man that is at variance with God.

The body of *Ahaziah* was not more ſick, than his ſoul was graceleſs: none but chance was his enemy, none but the god of *Ekron* muſt be his friend. He looks not up to the omnipotent hand of divine juſtice for the diſeaſe, or of mercy for the remedy; an idol is his refuge, whether for cure or intelligence. We hear not till now of *Baal-zebub*: this new god of flies is, perhaps, of his making, who now is a ſuiter to his own erection. All theſe heathen deities were but a devil, with change of appellations; the influence of that evil ſpirit deluded thoſe miſerable clients; elſe, there was no fly ſo impotent as that outſide of the god of *Ekron*. Who would think that any *Iſraelite* could ſo far dote upon a ſtock or a fiend? Time gathered much credit to this idol: in ſo much as the *Jews* afterwards ſtyled *Beel-zebub* the prince of all the regions of darkneſs. *Ahaziah* is the firſt that brings his oracle in requeſt, and pays him the tribute of his devotion: he ſends meſſengers, and ſays, *Go inquire of* Baal-zebub, *the god of* Ekron, *whether I ſhall recover of this diſeaſe*. The meſſage was either idle or wicked; idle, if he ſent it to a ſtock; if to a devil, both idle and wicked. What can the moſt intelligent ſpirits know of future things, but what they ſee either in their cauſes, or in the light of participation? What a madneſs was it in *Ahaziah* to ſeek to the poſtern, while the foregate ſtood open! Could thoſe evil ſpirits truly fortel events no way pre-exiſtent, yet they might not, without ſin, be conſulted;

the evil of their nature debars all the benefits of their information: if not as intelligencers, much leſs may they be ſought to as gods. Who cannot bluſh to hear and ſee that even the very evangelical *Iſrael* ſhould yield pilgrims to the ſhrines of darkneſs! How many, after this clear light of the goſpel, in their loſſes, in their ſickneſſes, ſend to theſe infernal oracles, and damn themſelves wilfully in a vain curioſity! The meſſage of the jealous God intercepts them with a juſt diſdain, as here by *Elijah; Is it not becauſe there is not a God in* Iſrael, *that ye go to inquire of* Baal-zebub *the god of* Ekron? What can be a greater diſparagement to the true God than to be neglected, than to ſtand aſide, and ſee us make love to an helliſh rival! were there no God in *Iſrael*, in heaven, what could we do other, what worſe! This affront, of whatever kind, *Ahaziah* cannot eſcape without a revenge: *Therefore thus ſaith the Lord, thou ſhalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but ſhalt ſurely die.* It is an high indignity to the true God, not to be ſought to in our neceſſities; but ſo to be caſhiered from our devotions, as to have a falſe god thruſt in his room, is ſuch a ſcorn, as it is well if it can eſcape with one death: let now the famous god of *Ekron* take off that brand of feared mortality, which the living God hath ſet upon *Ahaziah;* let *Baal-zebub* make good ſome better news to his diſtreſſed ſupplicant: rather the king of *Iſrael* is himſelf, without his repentance, haſting to *Beel-zebub.* This errand is ſoon done; the meſſengers are returned, ere they go. Not a little were they amazed to hear their ſecret meſſage from another's mouth; neither could chuſe but think, he that can tell what *Ahaziah* ſaid, what he thought, can foretel how he ſhall ſpeed. We have met with a greater God than we went to ſeek; what need we inquire for another anſwer? With this conceit, with this report, they return

turn to their ſick lord, and aſtoniſh him with ſo ſhort, ſo ſad a relation. No marvel, if the king inquired curiouſly of the habit and faſhion of the man that could know this, that durſt ſay this. They deſcribe him a man whether of an hairy ſkin, or of rough, coarſe, careleſs attire; thus dreſt, thus girded. *Ahaziah* readily apprehends it to be *Elijah*, the old friend of his father *Ahab*, of his mother *Jezebel*: more than once had he ſeen him, an unwelcome gueſt, in the court of *Iſrael*. The times had been ſuch, that the prophet could not at once ſpeak true, and pleaſe: nothing but reproofs and menaces ſounded from the mouth of *Elijah*: *Micaiah* and he were ſtill as welcome to the eyes of that guilty prince, as the *Syrian* arrow was into his fleſh. Too well therefore had *Ahaziah* noted that querulous ſeer, and now is not a little troubled to ſee himſelf, in ſucceſſion, haunted with that bold and ill-boding ſpirit.

Behold the true ſon of *Jezebel*; the anguiſh of his diſeaſe, the expectation of death, cannot take off his perſecution of *Elijah*: it is againſt his will that his death-bed is not bloody. Had *Ahaziah* meant any other than a cruel violence to *Elijah*, he had ſent a peaceable meſſenger to call him to the court; he had not ſent a captain, with a band of ſoldiers, to fetch him; the inſtruments, which he uſeth, carry revenge in their face: if he had not thought *Elijah* more than a man, what needed a band of fifty men to apprehend one? and if he did think him ſuch, why would he ſend to apprehend him by fifty? Surely *Ahaziah* knew of old, how miraculous a prophet *Elijah* was; what power that man had over all their baſe deities, what command of the elements, of the heavens; and yet he ſends to attack him. It is a ſtrange thing to ſee how wilfully godleſs men ſtrive againſt the ſtream of their own hearts, hating that which they know good, fighting againſt that which they know divine.

divine. What a groſs diſagreement is in the meſſage of this *Iſraelitiſh* captain? *Thou man of God, the king hath ſaid, come down:* if he were a man of God, how hath he offended? and if he have juſtly offended the anointed of God, how is he a man of God? and if he be a man of God, and have not offended, why ſhould he come down to puniſhment? Here is a kind confeſſion, with a falſe heart, with bloody hands: the world is full of theſe windy courteſies, real cruelties. Deadly malice lurks under fair compliments, and, while it flatters, killeth. The prophet hides not himſelf from the purſuit of *Ahaziah;* rather he ſits where he may be moſt conſpicuous, on the top of an hill: this band knows well where to find him, and climbs up, in the ſight of *Elijah*, for his arreſt. The ſteepneſs of the aſcent, when they drew near to the higheſt reach, yielded a convenience both of reſpiration and parley: thence doth the captain imperiouſly call down the prophet. Who would not tremble at the dreadful anſwer of *Elijah? If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and conſume thee, and thy fifty.* What ſhall we ſay? that a prophet is revengeful, that ſoldiers ſuffer while a prophet ſtrikes; that a prince's command is anſwered with imprecation; words with fire; that an unarmed ſeer ſhould kill one and fifty at a blow? There are few tracks of *Elijah* that are ordinary, and fit for common feet: his actions are more for wonder, than for precedent; not in his own defence would the prophet have been the death of ſo many, if God had not, by a peculiar inſtinct, made him an inſtrument of this juſt vengeance. The divine juſtice finds it meet to do this for the terror of *Iſrael*, that he might teach them, what it was to contemn, to perſecute a prophet, that they might learn to fear him whom they had forſaken, and confeſs, that heaven was ſenſible of their inſolencies and impieties.

impieties. If not as viſibly, yet as certainly, doth God puniſh the violations of his ordinances; the affronts offered to his meſſengers, ſtill and ever; not ever with the ſame ſpeed, ſometimes the puniſhment overtakes the act, ſometimes dogs it afar off, and ſeizeth upon the offender, when his crime is forgotten. Here, no ſooner is the word out of *Elijah*'s mouth, than the fire is out of heaven. O the wonderful power of a prophet! There ſits *Elijah* in his coarſe mantle, on the top of the hill, and commands the heavens, and they obey him; *Let fire fall down from heaven.* He needs no more but ſay what he would have done: the fire falls down, as before, upon the ſacrifice in *Carmel*, ſo now upon the ſoldiers of *Ahaziah*. What is man in the hands of his Maker? One flaſh of lightning hath conſumed theſe one and fifty: and if all the hoſts of *Iſrael*, yea of the world, had been in their room, there had needed no other force. What madneſs is it for him, whoſe breath is in his noſtrils, to contend with the Almighty? The time was, when two zealous diſciples would fain have imitated this fiery revenge of *Elijah*, and were repelled with a check; the very place puts them in mind of the judgment: not far from *Samaria* was this done by *Elijah*, and wiſht to be done by the diſciples. So churliſh a rejection of a Saviour ſeemed no leſs heinous, than the endeavour of apprehending a prophet: *Lord wilt thou, that we command fire to come down from heaven, and conſume them, as* Elias *did?* The world yielded but one *Elias*: that, which was zeal in him, might be fury in another; the leaſt variation of circumſtance may make an example dangerous; preſently therefore do they hear, *Ye know not of what ſpirit ye are.* It is the calling that varies the ſpirit: *Elijah* was God's miniſter for the execution of ſo ſevere a judgment; they were but the

ſervants

ſervants of their own impotent anger; there was fire in their breaſts which God never kindled. Far was it from the Saviour of men, to ſecond their earthly fire with his heavenly. He came indeed to ſend fire upon earth, but to warm, not to burn; and if to burn, not the perſons of men, but their corruptions. How much more ſafe is it for us to follow the meek prophet of the New Teſtament, than that fervent prophet of the Old? Let the matter of our prayers be the ſweet dews of mercy, not the fires of vengeance.

Would not any man have thought *Ahaziah* ſufficiently warned by ſo terrible a judgment. Could he chuſe but ſay, It is no meddling with a man that can ſpeak lightning and death! What he hath ſaid concerning me is too well approved, by what he hath done to my meſſengers; God's hand is with him, mine ſhall not be againſt him. Yet now, behold, the rage of *Ahaziah* is ſo much the more kindled by this fire from heaven; and a more reſolute captain, with a ſecond band, is ſent to fetch *Elijah* to death. This man is in haſte, and commands not only his deſcent, but his ſpeed; *Come down quickly.* The charge implies a threat; *Elijah* muſt look for force, if he yield not. There needs no other weapon for defence, for offence, than the ſame tongue, the ſame breath. God hath fire enough for all the troops of *Ahaziah.* Immediately doth a ſudden flame break out of heaven, and conſume this forward leader, and his bold followers. It is a juſt preſage and deſert of ruin, not to be warned. Worthily are they made examples, that will not take them.

What marble or flint is harder than a wicked heart? As if *Ahaziah* would deſpiteſully ſpit in the face of Heaven, and wreſtle a fall with the Almighty, he will needs yet again ſet a third captain upon ſo deſperate an employment! How hot a ſervice muſt this commander needs think himſelf put upon, who can but

but pity his ſtraits? there is death before him, death behind him: if he go not, the king's wrath is the meſſenger of death; if he go, the prophet's tongue is the executioner of death. Many a hard taſk will follow the ſervice of a prince wedded to his paſſion, divorced from God. Unwillingly, doubtleſs, and fearfully doth this captain climb up the hill to ſcale that impregnable fort; but now, when he comes near to the aſſault, the battery that he lays to it is his prayers; his ſureſt fight is upon his knees. *He went up, and came, and fell upon his knees before* Elijah, *and beſought him, and ſaid unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of theſe fifty thy ſervants, be precious in thy ſight.* He confeſſes the judgment that befel his predeceſſors; the monuments of their deſtruction were in his eye, and the terror of it in his heart; of an enemy therefore he is become a ſupplicant, and ſues not ſo much for the prophet's yieldance, as for his own life. This was the way to offer violence to the prophet of God, to the God of that prophet, even humble ſupplications; we muſt deprecate that evil, which we would avoid: if we would force bleſſings, we muſt entreat them. There is nothing to be gotten from God by ſtrong hand, any thing by ſuit. The life of the captain is preſerved: *Elijah* is by the angel commanded to go down with him ſpeedily, fearleſly. The prophet caſts not with himſelf, What ſafety can there be in this journey? I ſhall put myſelf into the hands of rude ſoldiers, and, by them, into the hands of an enraged king; if he did not eagerly thirſt after my blood, he had never ſought it with ſo much loſs. But, ſo ſoon as he had a charge from the angel, he walks down reſolutely, and, as it were, dares the dangers of ſo great an hoſtility. He knew that the ſame God, who had fought for him upon the hill, would not leave him in the valley; he knew the angel, which

bade him go, was guard enough againſt a world of enemies. Faith knows not how to fear, and can as eaſily contemn the ſuggeſtion of perils, as infidelity can raiſe them.

The prophet looks boldly upon the court, which doubtleſs was not a little diſaffected to him, and comes confidently into the bed-chamber of *Ahaziah*, and ſticks not to ſpeak over the ſame words to his head, which he had ſent him, not long ſince, by his firſt meſſengers. Not one ſyllable will the prophet abate of his errand. It is not for an herald of heaven to be out of countenance, or to mince ought of the moſt killing meſſages of his God.

Whether the unexpected confidence, both of the man and of the ſpeech, amazed the ſick king of *Iſrael;* or whether the fear of ſome preſent judgment (wherewith he might ſuſpect *Elijah* to come armed, upon any act of violence that ſhould be offered) overawed him; or whether now, at laſt, upon the ſight and hearing of this man of God, the king's heart began to relent, and check itſelf for that ſin, for which he was juſtly reproved, I know not; but ſure I am, the prophet goes away untouched: neither the furious purpoſes of *Ahaziah*, nor the exaſperations of a *Jezebel* can hurt that prophet, whom God hath intended to a fiery chariot. The hearts of kings are not their own; ſubjects are not ſo much in their hands, as they are in their Maker's. How eaſily can God tame the fierceneſs of any creature, and, in the midſt of their moſt heady career, ſtop them on the ſudden, and fetch them upon the knees of their humble ſubmiſſion! It is good truſting God with the events of his own commands, who can, at pleaſure, either avert evils, or improve them to good.

According to the word of the prophet, *Ahaziah* dies: not two whole years doth he ſit in the throne of *Iſrael*, which he now muſt yield, in the want of children,

children, to his brother. Wickedneſs ſhortens his reign; he had too much of *Ahab* and *Jezebel*, to expect the bleſſing, either of length or proſperity of government. As always in the other, ſo oft-times in this world, doth God teſtify his anger to wicked men. Some live long, that they may aggravate their judgment; others die ſoon, that they may haſten it.

CONTEM. V. *The rapture of* ELIJAH.

LONG and happily hath *Elijah* fought the wars of his God; and now, after his noble and glorious victories, God will ſend him a chariot of triumph: not ſuddenly would God ſnatch away his prophet without warning, without expectation; but acquaints him, before-hand, with the determination of his glory. How full of heavenly joy was the ſoul of *Elijah*, while he foreknew, and looked for this inſtant happineſs! with what contempt did he caſt his eyes upon that earth, which he was now preſently to leave! with what raviſhment of an inward pleaſure did he look upon that heaven which he was to enjoy! For a meet farewel to the earth, *Elijah* will go viſit the ſchools of the prophets, before his departure: theſe were in his way; of any part of the earth they were neareſt unto heaven. In an holy progreſs therefore he walks his laſt round, from *Gilgal*, near *Jordan*, to *Bethel*, from *Bethel* to *Jericho*, from *Jericho* to *Jordan* again. In all theſe ſacred colleges of divines, he meant to leave the legacy of his love, counſel, confirmation, bleſſing. How happy a thing it is, while we are upon earth, to improve our time and gifts to the beſt behoof of God's church; and, after the aſſurance of our own bleſſedneſs, to help others to the ſame heaven! But, O God, who can but wonder at the courſe of thy wiſe and powerful adminiſtrations! Even in the midſt of the degeneration and

idolatries of *Iſrael*, haſt thou reſerved to thyſelf whole ſocieties of holy prophets; and, out of thoſe ſinful and revolted tribes, haſt raiſed the two great miracles of prophets, *Elijah* and *Eliſha*, in an immediate ſucceſſion. *Judah* itſelf, under a religious *Jehoſaphat*, yielded not ſo eminent and clearly illuminated ſpirits. The mercy of our provident God will neither be confined nor excluded; neither confined to the places of public profeſſion, nor excluded from the depraved congregations of his own people: where he hath loved, he cannot eaſily be eſtranged: rather, where ſin abounds, his grace aboundeth much more, and raiſeth ſo much ſtronger helps as he ſees the dangers greater.

Happy was *Eliſha* in the attendance of ſo gracious a maſter, and the more happy that he knows it. Fain would *Elijah* ſhake him off at *Gilgal*; if not there at *Bethel*; if not yet there, at *Jericho*. A private meſſage, on which *Elijah* muſt go alone, is pretended from the Lord. Whether ſhall we ſay the prophet did this for the trial of the conſtant affection of his careful and diligent ſervant; or, that it was concealed from *Elijah*, that his departure was revealed to *Eliſha*? Perhaps he, that knew of his own reception into heaven, did not know what witneſſes would be allowed to that miraculous act; and now his humble modeſty affected a ſilent and unnoted paſſage; even *Eliſha* knew ſomething that was hid from his maſter, now upon the threſhold of heaven. No mere creature was ever made of the whole counſel of the Higheſt: ſome things have been diſcloſed to babes and novices, that have been cloſed up to the moſt wiſe and judicious. In natural ſpeculations, the greater wit and deeper judgment ſtill carries it; but, in the revelations of God, the favour of his choice ſways all, not the power of our apprehenſion. The maſter may both command and entreat his ſervant's ſtay in vain.

Eliſha

Eliſha muſt be pardoned this holy and zealous diſobedience, *As the Lord liveth, and as thy ſoul liveth, I will not leave thee.* His maſter may be withdrawn from him, he will not be withdrawn from his maſter. He knew that the bleſſing was at the parting; and if he had diligently attended all his life, and now ſlacked in the laſt act, he had loſt the reward of his ſervice. The evening praiſes the day, and the chief grace of the theatre is in the laſt ſcene. *Be faithful to the death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*

That *Elijah* ſhould be tranſlated, and what day he ſhould be tranſlated, God would have no ſecret: the ſons of the prophets at *Bethel*, at *Jericho*, both know it, and aſk *Eliſha* if he knew it not: *Knoweſt thou that the Lord will take away thy maſter from thy head this day?* and he anſwered, *Yea I know it, hold ye your peace.* How familiarly do theſe prophets interknow one another! how kindly do they communicate their viſions! Seldom ever was any knowledge given to keep, but to impart: The grace of this rich jewel is loſt in concealment. The removal of an *Elijah* is ſo important a buſineſs, that it is not fit to be done without noiſe: many ſhall have their ſhare in his loſs; he muſt be miſſed on the ſudden; it was meet therefore, that the world ſhould know his rapture ſhould be divine and glorious. I do not find, where the day of any natural death is notified to ſo many; by how much more wonder there was in this aſſumption, by ſo much more ſhall it be forerevealed. It is enough for ordinary occurrents to be known by their event: ſupernatural things have need of premonition, that mens hearts may both be prepared for their receipt, and confirmed in their certainty. Thrice was *Eliſha* entreated, thrice hath he denied, to ſtay behind his now departing maſter; on whom both his eyes and his thoughts are ſo fixed, that he cannot give

give allowance ſo much as to the interpellation of a queſtion of his fellow prophets: together therefore are this wonderful pair come to the laſt ſtage of their ſeparation, the banks of *Jordan*. Thoſe, that were not admitted to be attendants of the journey, yet will not be debarred from being ſpectators of ſo marvellous an iſſue. Fifty men of the ſons of the prophets went and ſtood to view afar off; I marvel there were no more: how could any ſon of the prophets ſtay within the college walls that day, when he knew what was meant to *Elijah?* perhaps though they knew that to be the prophet's laſt day, yet they might think his diſparition ſhould be ſudden and inſenſible; beſides, they found how much he affected ſecrecy in this intended departure: yet the fifty prophets of *Jericho* will make proof of their eyes, and with much intention eſſay who ſhall have the laſt ſight of *Elijah*. Miracles are not purpoſed to ſilence and obſcurity: God will not work wonders without witneſſes, ſince he doth them on purpoſe to win glory to his name; his end were fruſtrate without their notice. Even ſo, O Saviour, when thou hadſt raiſed thyſelf from the dead, thou wouldſt be ſeen of more than five hundred brethren at once; and when thou wouldſt raiſe up thy glorified body from earth into heaven, thou didſt not aſcend from ſome cloſe valley, but from the *Mount of Olives;* not in the night, not alone, but in the clear day, in the view of many eyes, which were ſo fixed upon that point of thine heaven, that they could ſcarce be removed by the check of angels.

Jordan muſt be croſſed by *Elijah* in his way to heaven: there muſt be a meet parallel betwixt the two great prophets, that ſhall meet Chriſt upon *Tabor*, *Moſes* and *Elias:* both received viſions on *Horeb*, to both God appeared there in fire, and other forms of terror: both were ſent to kings, one to *Pharaoh*,

Pharaoh, the other to *Ahab;* both prepared miraculous tables; the one of quails and manna in the desert, the other of meal and oil in *Sarepta;* both opened heaven, the one for that nourishing dew, the other for those refreshing showers; both revenged idolatries with the sword, the one upon the worshippers of the golden calf, the other upon the four hundred *Baalites:* both quenched the drought of *Israel*, the one out of the rock, the other out of the cloud; both divided the waters, the one of the red sea, the other of *Jordan;* both of them are forewarned of their departure; both must be fetcht away beyond *Jordan;* the body of *Elijah* is translated, the body of *Moses* is hid: what *Moses* doth by his rod, *Elijah* doth by his mantle; with that he smites the waters, and they, as fearing the divine power which wrought with the prophets, run away from him, and stand on heaps, leaving their dry channel for the passage of those awful feet: it is not long since he mulcted them with a general exsiccation; now he only bids them stand aside, and give way to his last walk, that he might with dry feet mount up into the celestial chariot.

The waters do not now first obey him; they know that mantle of old, which hath oft given laws to their falling, rising, standing; they are past over, and, now when *Elijah* finds himself treading on his last earth, he proffers a munificent boon to his faithful servant, *Ask what I shall do for thee, before I am taken from thee.* I do not hear him say, Ask of me when I am gone; in my glorified condition, I shall be more able to bestead thee; but, Ask before I go. We have a communion with the saints departed, not a commerce: when they are enabled to do more for us, they are less apt to be solicited by us: it is safe suing where we are sure to be heard. Had not *Elijah* received a peculiar instinct for this proffer, he had not

not been thus liberal: it were presumption to be bountiful on another's cost, without leave of the owner. The mercy of our good God allows his favourites not only to receive, but to give; not only to receive for themselves, but to convey blessings to others; what can that man want that is befriended of the faithful.

Elisha needs not go far to seek for a suit, it was in his heart, his mouth. *Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.* Every prophet must be a son to *Elijah;* but *Elisha* would be his heir, and craves the happy right of his primogeniture, the double share to his brethren. It was not wealth, nor safety, nor ease, nor honour that *Elisha* cares for; the world lies open before him, he may take his choice, the rest he contemneth, nothing will serve him but a large measure of his master's spirit: no carnal thought was guilty of this sacred ambition. Affectation of eminence was too base a conceit to fall into that man of God. He saw that the times needed strong convictions, he saw that he could not otherways wield the succession to such a master, therefore he sues for a double portion of spirit; the spirit of prophecy to foreknow, the spirit of power to work. We cannot be too covetous, too ambitious of spiritual gifts, such especially as may enable us to win most advantage to God in our vocations. Our wishes are the true touch-stone of our estate; such as we wish to be, we are. Worldly hearts affect earthly things; spiritual, divine. We cannot better know what we are indeed, than by what we would be.

Elijah acknowledges the difficulty, and promises the grant of so great a request, suspended yet upon the condition of *Elisha*'s eye-sight. *If thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be.* What are the eyes to the furniture of the soul? what power is there in those

visive

viſive beams to draw down a double portion of *Elijah*'s ſpirit? God doth not always look at efficacy and merit in the conditions of our actions, but at the freedom of his own appointments. The eye was only to be employed as the ſervant of the heart, that the deſires might be ſo much more intended with the ſight. Vehemence is the way to ſpeed, both in earth and in heaven. If but the eye-lids of *Eliſhà* fall, if his thoughts ſlacken, his hopes are daſhed. There muſt be fixedneſs and vigilance in thoſe that deſire double graces.

Elijah was going on and talking, when the chariot of heaven came to fetch him: ſurely, had not that conference been needful and divine, it had given way to meditation, and *Elijah* had been taken up rather from his knees, than from his feet. There can be no better poſture or ſtate, for the meſſenger of our diſſolution to find us in, than in a diligent proſecution of our calling. The buſy attendance of our holy vocation is no leſs pleaſing to God, than an immediate devotion. Happy is the ſervant whom the maſter, when he comes, ſhall find ſo doing.

O the ſingular glory of *Elijah!* What mortal creature ever had this honour to be viſibly fetched by the angels of God to his heaven? Every ſoul of the elect is attended and carried to bleſſedneſs by thoſe inviſible meſſengers; but, what fleſh and blood was ever graced with ſuch a convoy? There are three bodily inhabitants of heaven, *Enoch*, *Elijah*, our Saviour Chriſt; the firſt before the law, the ſecond under the law, the third under the goſpel, all three in a ſeveral form of tranſlation. Our bleſſed Saviour raiſed himſelf to and above the heavens, by his own immediate power; he aſcended as the Son, they as ſervants: he as God, they as creatures. *Elijah* aſcended by the viſible miniſtry of angels; *Enoch* inſenſibly. Wherefore, O God, haſt thou done this, but to give

us a taſte of what ſhall be! to let us ſee that heaven was never ſhut to the faithful; to give us aſſurance of the future glorification of this mortal and corruptible part!

Even thus, O Saviour, when thou ſhalt deſcend from heaven with a ſhout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God, we that are alive and remain ſhall be caught up, together with the raiſed bodies of thy ſaints, into the clouds, to meet thee in the air, to dwell with thee in glory.

Many forms have thoſe celeſtial ſpirits taken to themſelves, in their apparitions to men: but, of all other, moſt often hath the Almighty made his meſſengers *a flame of fire;* never more properly than here. How had the Spirit of God kindled the hot fires of zeal in the breaſt of *Elijah!* How had this prophet thrice commanded fire from heaven to earth! How fitly now at laſt do theſe ſeraphical fires carry him from earth to heaven!

What do we ſee in this rapture of *Elijah*, but violence and terror, whirlwind and fire? two of thoſe fearful repreſentations which the prophet had in the rock of *Horeb*. Never any man entered into glory with eaſe; even the moſt favourable change hath ſome equivalency to a natural diſſolution. Although, doubtleſs, to *Elijah* this fire had a lightſomeneſs and reſplendence, not terror; this whirlwind had ſpeed, not violence. Thus haſt thou, O Saviour, bidden us, when the elements ſhall be diſſolved, and the heavens ſhall be flaming about our ears, to lift up our heads with joy, becauſe our redemption draweth nigh. Come death, come fire, come whirlwind, they are worthy to be welcome, that ſhall carry us to immortality!

This arreption was ſudden, yet *Eliſha* ſees both the chariot and the horſes, and the aſcent; and cries to his now changed maſter, between heaven and earth,

earth, *My father, my father, the chariot of* Iſrael, *and the horſemen thereof. Shaphat* of *Abel-meholah* hath yielded this title to *Elijah*, the natural father of *Eliſha*, to the ſpiritual: neither of them may be neglected; but, after the yoke of oxen killed at the farewel, we hear of no more greetings, no more bewailings of his bodily parent; and now, that *Elijah* is taken from him, he cries out like a diſtreſſed orphan, *My father, my father;* and, when he hath loſt the ſight of him, he rends his clothes in pieces, according to the faſhion of the moſt paſſionate mourners: that *Eliſha* ſees his maſter half way in heaven, cannot take away the ſorrow of his loſs. The departure of a faithful prophet of God is worthy of our lamentation: neither is it private affection that muſt ſway our grief, but reſpects to the public. *Eliſha* ſays not only, *My father*, but, *the chariot and horſemen of* Iſrael. That we have forgone a father, ſhould not ſo much trouble us, as that *Iſrael* hath loſt his guard. Certainly the view of this heavenly chariot and horſes, that came for *Elijah*, puts *Eliſha* in mind of that chariot and horſemen which *Elijah* was to *Iſrael*. Theſe were God's chariots, *Elijah* was theirs: God's chariot and theirs are, upon the ſame wheels, mounted into heaven. No forces are ſo ſtrong as the ſpiritual; the prayers of an *Elijah* are more powerful, than all the armies of fleſh. The firſt thing that this ſeer diſcerns, after the ſeparation of his maſter, is the nakedneſs of *Iſrael* in his loſs. If we muſter ſoldiers, and loſe zealous prophets, it is but a woful exchange.

Elijah's mantle falls from him in the riſing; there was no uſe of that, whither he was going; there was, whence he was taken. *Eliſha* juſtly takes up this dear monument of his glorified maſter: a good ſupply for his rent garments. This was it which, in

preſage of his future right, *Elijah* inveſted him withal upon the firſt ſight, when he was ploughing with the twelve yoke of oxen; now it falls from heaven to his poſſeſſion. I do not ſee him adore ſo precious a relique, I ſee him take it up and caſt it about him. Penſive and maſterleſs does he now come back to the banks of *Jordan*, whoſe ſtream he muſt paſs in his return to the ſchools of the prophets. Erewhile he ſaw what way that river gave to the mantle of *Elijah*, he knew that power was not in the cloth, but in the ſpirit of him that wore it. To try therefore whether he were no leſs the heir of that ſpirit than of that garment, he took the mantle of *Elijah*, and ſmote the waters, and ſaid, *Where is the Lord God of* Elijah? *Eliſha* doth not expoſtulate and challenge, but pray: as if he had ſaid, Lord God, it was thy promiſe to me by my departed maſter, that if I ſhould ſee him in his laſt paſſage, a double portion of his ſpirit ſhould be upon me: I followed him with my eyes in that fire and whirlwind: now therefore, O God, make good thy gracious word to thy ſervant; ſhew ſome token unto me for good; make this the firſt proof of the miraculous power wherewith thou ſhalt endue me: let *Jordan* give the ſame way to me, that it gave to my maſter. Immediately the ſtream, as acknowledging the ſame mantle, though in another hand, divides itſelf, and yields paſſage to the ſucceſſor of *Elijah*.

The fifty ſons of the prophets, having been afar-off witneſſes of theſe admirable events, do well ſee that *Elijah*, tho' tranſlated in body, hath yet left his ſpirit behind him: they meet *Eliſha*, and bow themſelves to the ground before him. It was not the outſide of *Elijah* which they had wont to ſtoop unto with ſo much veneration, it was his ſpirit, which, ſince they now find in another ſubject, they entertain

tain with equal reverence: no envy, no emulation raiſeth up their ſtomachs againſt *Elijah*'s ſervant, but, where they ſee eminent graces, they are willingly proſtrate. Thoſe that are truly gracious, do no leſs rejoice in the riches of others gifts, than humbly under-value their own. Theſe men were trained up in the ſchools of the prophets, *Eliſha* at the plough and cart; yet, now they ſtand not upon terms of their worth, and his meanneſs, but meekly fall down before him whom God had honoured: it is not to be regarded who the man is, but whom God would make him. The more unlikely the means are, the more is the glory of the workman: it is the praiſe of an holy ingenuity to magnify the graces of God, where-ever it finds them.

Theſe young prophets are no leſs full of zeal, than reverence; zeal to *Elijah*, reverence to *Eliſha*. They ſee *Elijah* carried up in the air; they knew this was not the firſt time of his ſupernatural removal: imagining it therefore poſſible, that the ſpirit of God had caſt him upon ſome remote mountain, or valley, they proffer the labour of their ſervants to ſeek him. In ſome things, even profeſſed ſeers are blind: could they think God would ſend ſuch a chariot and horſes for a leſs voyage than heaven.

Eliſha, knowing his maſter beyond all the ſphere of mortality, forbids them; good-will makes them unmannerly, their importunity urges him till he is aſhamed; not his approbation, but their vehemence carries at laſt a condeſcent, elſe he might, perhaps, have ſeemed enviouſly unwilling to fetch back ſo admired a maſter and loath to forgo that mantle. Some things may be yielded for the redeeming of our own vexation, and avoidance of others miſ-conſtruction, which, out of true judgment, we ſee no cauſe to affect.

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The meſſengers, tired with three days ſearch, turn back as wiſe as they went. Some men are beſt ſatiſfied when they have wearied themſelves in their own ways: nothing will teach them wit but diſappointments. Their painful error leads them to a right conceit of *Elijah*'s happier tranſportation. Thoſe that would find *Elijah*, let them aſpire to the heavenly paradiſe; let them follow the high ſteps of his ſincere faithfulneſs, ſtrong patience, undaunted courage, fervent zeal; ſhortly, let them walk in the ways of his holy and conſtant obedience; at laſt, God ſhall ſend the fiery chariot of death to fetch them up to hat heaven of heavens, where they ſhall triumph in everlaſting joys.

CONTEM. VI. ELISHA *healing the waters,—Curſing the children,—Relieving the kings.*

IT is good making uſe of a prophet while we have him. *Eliſha* ſtayed ſomewhile at *Jericho*, the citizens reſort to him with a common ſuit: their ſtructure was not more pleaſant than their waters unwholſome, and their ſoil by thoſe corrupt waters: they ſue to *Eliſha* for the remedy. Why had they not all this while made their moan to *Elijah?* Was it that they were more awed with his greater auſterity? or was it, that they met not with ſo fit an opportunity of his commoration amongſt them? It was told them what power *Eliſha* had exerciſed upon the waters of *Jordan*, and now they ply him for theirs. Examples of beneficence eaſily move us to a requeſt and expectation of favours.

What ailed the waters of *Jericho?* ſurely, originally they were not ill affected: no men could be ſo fooliſh as to build a city where neither earth nor water were uſeful: mere proſpect could not carry men to the neglect of health and profit. *Hiel* the *Bethelite* would never

never have re-edified it with the danger of a curſe, ſo lately as in the days of *Ahab*, if it had been of old notorious for ſo foul an annoyance: not therefore the ancient malediction of *Joſhua*, not the neighbourhood of that noiſome lake of *Sodom*, was guilty of this diſeaſe of the ſoil and waters, but the late ſins of the inhabitants. *He turneth the rivers into a wilderneſs, and water-ſprings into a dry ground; a fruitful land into barrenneſs, for the wickedneſs of them that dwell therein.* How oft have we ſeen the ſame field both full and famiſhing? How oft the ſame waters both faſe, and, by ſome eruption, or new tincture, hurtful? Howſoever natural cauſes may concur, heaven and earth, and air and waters, follow the temper of our ſouls, of our lives, and are therefore indiſpoſed becauſe we are ſo. *Jericho* began now to make itſelf capable of a better ſtate, ſince it was now become a receptacle of prophets: *Eliſha* is willing to gratify his hoſts; it is reaſon that any place ſhould fare the better for the preſence of divines. The medicine is more ſtrange than the diſeaſe; *Bring me a new cruſe, and put ſalt therein.* Why a cruſe? why new? why ſalt in that new cruſe? How ſhould ſalt make water potable? or, if there were any ſuch virtue in it, what could a cruſeful do to a whole current? or, if that meaſure were ſufficient, what was the age of the cruſe to the force of the ſalt? Yet *Eliſha* calls for ſalt in a new cruſe. God, who wrought this by his prophet, is a free agent; as he will not bind his power to means, ſo will he, by his power, bind unlikely means to perform his will.

Natural proprieties have no place in miraculous works: no leſs eaſy is it for God to work by contrary, than ſubordinate powers.

The prophet doth not caſt the ſalt into the channel, but into the ſpring of the waters. If the fountain be redreſſed, the ſtreams cannot be faulty; as, contrarily,

contrarily, the purity and ſoundneſs of the ſtream avails nothing to the redreſs of the fountain. Reformation muſt begin at the well-head of the abuſe. The order of being is a good guide to the method of amending. Virtue doth not run backward. Had *Eliſha* caſt the ſalt into the brooks and ditches, the remedy muſt have ſtriven againſt the ſtream to reach up to the ſpring; now it is but one labour to cure the fountain. Our heart is a well of bitter and venomous water, our actions are the ſtreams: in vain ſhall we cleanſe our hands, while our hearts are evil.

The cruſe and the ſalt muſt be their own; the act muſt be his, the power God's. *He caſt the ſalt into the ſpring*, and ſaid, *Thus ſaith the Lord, I have healed theſe waters; there ſhall not be from thence any more death or barrenneſs.* Far was it from *Eliſha* to challenge ought to himſelf. Before, when he ſhould divide the waters of *Jordan*, he did not ſay, Where is the power of *Eliſha*, but, Where is the Lord God of *Elijah?* and now, when he ſhould cure the waters of *Jericho*, he ſays not, Thus ſaith *Eliſha*, but, Thus ſaith the Lord, *I have healed theſe waters.* How careful is the man of God that no part of God's glory ſhould ſtick to his own fingers! *Jericho* ſhall know to whom they owe the bleſſing, that they may duly return the thanks. *Eliſha* profeſſes he can do no more of himſelf than that ſalt, than that cruſe; only God ſhall work by him, by it; and whatever that Almighty hand undertakes, cannot fail, yea is already done; neither doth he ſay, *I will heal*, but, *I have healed.* Even ſo, O God, if thou caſt into the fountain of our hearts but one cruſeful of the ſalt of thy Spirit, we are whole, no thought can paſs between the receipt and the remedy.

As the general viſiter of the ſchools of the prophets, *Eliſha* paſſeth from *Jericho* to that other college at *Bethel*. *Bethel* was a place of ſtrange compoſition;

poſition; there was at once the golden calf of *Jeroboam*, and the ſchool of God; true religion and idolatry found a free harbour within thoſe walls. I do not marvel that God's prophets would plant there; there was the moſt need of their preſence, where they found the ſpring-head of corruption: phyſicians are of moſt uſe where diſeaſes do abound. *As he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and ſaid to him, Go up thou bald-head; Go up thou bald-head.* Even the very boys of *Bethel* have learned to ſcoff at a prophet; the ſpite of their idolatrous parents is eaſily propagated; children are ſuch as their inſtitution; infancy is led altogether by imitation, it hath neither words nor actions, but infuſed by others; if it have good or ill language, it is but borrowed, and the ſhame or thank is due to thoſe that lent it them.

What was it that theſe ill-taught children upbraided to the prophet, but a ſlight natural defect, not worthy the name of a blemiſh, the want of a little hair; at the beſt a comely excrement, no part of the body. Had there been deformity in that ſmoothneſs of the head, which ſome great wits have honoured with praiſes, a faultleſs and remedileſs eye-ſore had been no fit matter for a taunt. How ſmall occaſions will be taken to diſgrace a prophet! if they could have ſaid ought worſe, *Eliſha* had not heard of this; God had crowned that head with honour, which the *Bethelitiſh* children loaded with ſcorn. Who would have thought the rude terms of waggiſh boys worthy of any thing but neglect! *Eliſha* looks at them with ſevere brows, and, like the heir of him that called down fire upon the two captains and their fifties, curſes them in the name of the Lord; two ſhe-bears, out of the wood, haſten to be his executioners, and tear two and forty of them in pieces. O fearful ex-

ample of divine juſtice! This was not the revenge of an angry prophet, it was the puniſhment of a righteous judge. God and his ſeer looked through theſe children at the parents, at all *Iſrael;* he would puniſh the parents miſnurturing their children, to the contemptuous uſage of a prophet, with the death of thoſe children which they had miſ-taught. He would teach *Iſrael* what it was to miſuſe a prophet; and, if he would not endure theſe contumelies unrevenged in the mouths of children, what vengeance was enough for aged perſecutors?

Doubtleſs ſome of the children eſcaped to tell the news of their fellows: what lamentation do we think there was in the ſtreets of *Bethel!* how did the diſtreſſed mothers wring their hands for this woful orbation! And now when they came forth to fetch the remnants of their own fleſh, what a ſad ſpectacle it was to find the fields ſtrewed with thoſe mangled carcaſes! It is an unprofitable ſorrow that follows a judgment. Had theſe parents been as careful to train up their children in good diſcipline, and to correct their diſorders, as they are now paſſionate in bemoaning their loſs, this ſlaughter had never been. In vain do we look for good of thoſe children, whoſe education we have neglected. In vain do we grieve for thoſe miſcarriages which our care might have prevented.

Eliſha knew the ſucceſs, yet doth he not balk the city of *Bethel.* Do we not wonder that the furious impatience of thoſe parents, whom the curſe of *Eliſha* robbed of their children, did not break forth to ſome malicious practice againſt the prophet? would we not think the prophet might miſdoubt ſome hard meaſure from thoſe exaſperated citizens? There lay his way; he follows God without fear of men, as well knowing that either they durſt not, or they could

could not act violence. They knew there were bears in the wood, and fires in heaven, and, if their malice would have ventured above their courage, they could have no more power over *Eliſha* in the ſtreets, than thoſe hungry beaſts had in the way. Whither dare not the prophet go when God calls him? Having viſited the ſchools of the prophets, *Eliſha* retires to mount *Carmel*, and, after ſome holy ſolitarineſs, returns to the city of *Samaria*. He can never be a profitable ſeer, that is either always or never alone. *Carmel* ſhall fit him for *Samaria*, contemplation for action: that mother city of *Iſrael*, muſt needs afford him moſt work; yet is the throne of *Ahaziah* ſucceeded by a brother leſs ill than himſelf, than the parents of both. *Ahab*'s impiety hath not a perfect heir of *Jehoram:* that ſon of his hates his *Baal*, though he keeps his calves. Even into the moſt wicked families it pleaſeth God to caſt his powerful reſtraints, that all are not equally vicious. It is no news to ſee lewd men make ſcruple of ſome ſins; the world were not to live in, if all ſins were affected by all: it is no thank to *Ahab* and *Jezebel* that their ſon is no *Baalite*. As no good is traduced from parents, ſo not all evil: there is an almighty hand that ſtops the foul current of nature, at his pleaſure; no idolater can ſay, that his child ſhall not be a convert.

The affinity betwixt the houſes of *Iſrael* and *Judah*, holds good in ſucceſſion; *Jehoram* inherits the friendſhip, the aid of *Jehoſaphat;* whoſe counſel, as is moſt likely, had cured him of that *Baaliſm*. It was a good war whereto he ſolicits the good king of *Judah*. The king of *Moab*, who had been an ancient tributary from the days of *David*, falls now from his homage, and refuſes to pay his hundred thouſand lambs, and hundred thouſand rams with fleeces, to the king of *Iſrael;* the backs of *Iſrael* can ill

miſs the wool of *Moab*, they will put on iron to recover their cloth. *Jehoſaphat* had been once well chid, well frighted, for joining with *Ahab* againſt *Aram;* yet, doth he not ſtick now again to come into the field with *Jehoram*, againſt *Moab:* the cauſe is more favourable, leſs dangerous. *Baal* is caſt down; the images of the falſe gods are gone, though the falſe images of the true God ſtand ſtill: beſides, this rebellious *Moab* had joined with the *Syrians* formerly againſt *Judah*, ſo as *Jehoſaphat* is intereſted in the revenge.

After reſolution of the end, wiſely do theſe kings deliberate of the way. It is agreed to paſs through *Edom;* that kingdom was annexed to the crown of *Judah;* well might *Jehoſaphat* make bold with his own. It was, it ſeems, a march far about in the meaſure of the way, but neareſt to their purpoſe; the aſſault would be more eaſy, if the paſſage were more tedious. The three kings of *Iſrael*, *Judah*, *Edom*, together with their armies, are upon foot; they are no ſooner come into the parching wilds of *Edom*, than they are ready to die for thirſt. If the channels were far off, yet the waters were farther: the ſcorching beams of the ſun have dried them up, and have left thoſe rivers more fit for walk than entertainment. What are the greateſt monarchs of the world, if they want but water to their mouths? What can their crowns, and plumes, and rich arms avail them, when they are abridged but of that which is the drink of beaſts? With dry tongues and lips, do they now confer of their common miſery. *Jehoram* deplores the calamity into which they were fallen, but *Jehoſaphat* aſks for a prophet; every man can bewail a miſery, every man cannot find the way out of it: ſtill yet I hear good *Jehoſaphat* ſpeak too late; he ſhould have inquired for a prophet, ere he had gone forth, ſo had he avoided

theſe

theſe ſtraits. Not to conſult at all with God is *Jehoram*'s ſin, to conſult late is *Jehoſaphat*'s; the former is atheous careleſneſs, the latter forgetful overſight. The beſt man may ſlacken good duties, the worſt contemns them.

Not without ſome ſpeciality from God, doth *Eliſha* follow the camp; elſe, that had been no element for a prophet: little did the good king of *Judah* think that God was ſo near him; purpoſely, was this holy ſeer ſent for the ſuccour of *Jehoſaphat* and his faithful followers, when they were ſo far from dreaming of their delivery, that they knew not of a danger. It would be wide with the beſt men, if the eye of divine Providence were not open upon them, when the eye of their care is ſhut towards it. How well did *Eliſha* in the wars? the ſtrongeſt ſquadron of *Iſrael* was within that breaſt: all their armour of proof had not ſo much ſafety and protection, as his mantle. Though the king of *Iſrael* would take no notice of the prophet, yet one of his courtiers did; *Here is* Eliſha *the ſon of* Shaphat, *which poured water on the hands of* Elijah; this follower of *Jehoram* knows *Eliſha* by his own name, by his father's, by his maſter's. The court of *Iſrael* was profane and idolatrous enough; yet, even there, God's prophet had both knowledge and honour; his very ſervice to *Elijah* was enough to win him reverence. It is better to be an attendant of ſome man, than be attended by many; that he had poured water on *Elijah*'s hands was inſinuation enough, that he could pour out water for thoſe three kings. The three kings walked down, by the motion of *Jehoſaphat*, to the man of God: it was news to ſee three kings going down to the ſervant of him who ran before the chariot of *Ahab*. Religion and neceſſity have both of them much power of humiliation, I know not whether more;

more; either zeal, or need, will make a prophet honoured.

How ſharply dares the man of God to chide his ſovereign, the king of *Iſrael!* The liberty of the prophets was no leſs ſingular than their calling; he that would borrow their tongue, muſt ſhew their commiſſion. As God reproved kings for their ſakes, ſo did not they ſtick to reprove kings for his ſake. Thus much freedom they muſt leave to their ſucceſſors, that we may not ſpare the vices of them, whoſe perſons we muſt ſpare.

Juſtly is *Jehoram* turned off to the prophets of his father, and the prophets of his mother. It is but right and equal, that thoſe, which we have made the comfort and ſtay of our peace, ſhould be the refuge of our extremity. If our proſperity have made the world our God, how worthily ſhall our death-bed be choked with this exprobration! Neither would the caſe bear an apology, nor the time an expoſtulation; *Jehoram* cannot excuſe, he can complain; he finds that now three kings, three kingdoms are at the mercy of one prophet; it was time for him to ſpeak fair; nothing ſounds from him but lamentations and entreaties; *Nay, for the Lord hath called theſe three kings together to deliver them into the hand of* Moab. *Jehoram* hath ſo much grace as to confeſs the impotency of thoſe he had truſted, and the power of that God whom he had neglected; every ſinner cannot ſee and acknowledge the hand of God in his ſufferings. Already hath the diſtreſſed prince gained ſomething by his miſery: none complains ſo much as he, none feels ſo much as he; all the reſt ſuffer for him, and therefore he ſuffers in them all.

The man of God, who well ſees the inſufficiency of *Jehoram*'s humiliation, lays on yet more load; *As the Lord liveth before whom I ſtand, ſurely, were it not that I regard the preſence of* Jehoſaphat *the king*

king of Judah, *I would not look toward thee, nor ſee thee.* Behold the double ſpirit of *Elijah!* the maſter was not more bold with the father, than the ſervant was with the ſon. *Eliſha* was a ſubject and a prophet; he muſt ſay that as a prophet, which he might not as a ſubject; as a prophet he would not have looked at him, whom as a ſubject he would have bowed to. It is one thing when God ſpeaks by him, another when he ſpeaks of himſelf; that it might well appear his diſlike of ſin ſtood with his honour of ſovereignty, *Jehoſaphat* goes away with that reſpect which *Jehoram* miſſed; no leſs doth God and his prophet regard religious ſincerity, than they abhor idolatry and profaneneſs. What ſhall not be done for a *Jehoſaphat?* for his ſake ſhall thoſe two other princes, and their vaſt armies, live and prevail. *Edom* and *Iſrael*, whether ſingle or conjoined, had periſhed by the drought of the deſart, by the ſword of *Moab;* one *Jehoſaphat* gives them both life and victory. It is in the power of one good man to oblige a world; we receive true, though inſenſible favours, from the preſence of the righteous. Next to being good, it is happy to converſe with them that are ſo; if we be not bettered by their example, we are bleſt by their protection.

Who wonders not to hear a prophet call for a minſtrel in the midſt of that mournful diſtreſs of *Iſrael* and *Judah!* who would not have expected his charge of tears and prayers, rather than of muſic! how unreaſonable are ſongs to an heavy heart! It was not for their ears, it was for his own boſom, that *Eliſha* called for muſic; that his ſpirits, after their zealous agitation, might be ſweetly compoſed, and put into a meet temper for receiving the calm viſions of God. Perhaps it was ſome holy *Levite* that followed the camp of *Jehoſaphat*, whoſe minſtrelſy was required for ſo ſacred a purpoſe. None but a quiet breaſt is capable

capable of divine revelations; nothing is more powerful to ſettle a troubled heart than a melodious harmony; the ſpirit of prophecy was not the more invited, the prophet's ſpirit was the better diſpoſed, by pleaſing ſounds. The ſame God, that will reveal his will to the prophet, ſuggeſts this demand, *Bring me a minſtrel.* How many ſay thus, when they would put God from them! Profane mirth, wanton muſic, debauches the ſoul, and makes no leſs room for the unclean ſpirit, than ſpiritual melody doth for the divine.

No prophet had ever the ſpirit at command. The hand of the minſtrel can do nothing without the hand of the Lord: while the muſic ſounds in the ear, God ſpeaks to the heart of *Eliſha; Thus ſaith the Lord, Make this valley full of ditches; ye ſhall not ſee wind, neither ſhall ye ſee rain, yet that valley ſhall be full of water,* &c. To ſee wind and rain, in the height of that drought, would have ſeemed as wonderful as pleaſing; but to ſee abundance of water, without wind or rain, was yet more miraculous. I know not how the ſight of the means abates our admiration of the effect; where no cauſes can be found out, we are forced to confeſs omnipotency. *Elijah* relieved *Iſrael* with water, but it was out of the clouds, and thoſe clouds roſe from the ſea; but whence *Eliſha* ſhall fetch it, is not more marvellous than ſecret.

All that evening, all that night, muſt the faith of *Iſrael* and *Judah* be exerciſed with expectation. At the hour of the morning ſacrifice, no ſooner did the blood of that oblation guſh forth, than the ſtreams of water guſhed forth into their new channels, and filled the country with a refreſhing moiſture: *Elijah* fetched down his fire at the hour of the evening ſacrifice; *Eliſha* fetched up his water at the hour of the morning ſacrifice. God gives reſpect to his own

own hours, for the encouragement of our obſervation: if his wiſdom hath ſet us any peculiar times, we cannot keep them without a bleſſing: the devotions of all true *Jews*, all the world over, were in that hour combined. How ſeaſonably doth the wiſdom of God pick out that inſtant, wherein he might at once anſwer both *Eliſha*'s prophecy, and his people's prayers.

The prophet hath aſſured the kings, not of water only, but of victory. *Moab* hears of enemies, and is addreſſed to war; their own error ſhall cut their throats; they riſe ſoon enough to beguile themſelves; the beams of the riſing ſun, gliſtering upon thoſe vaporous and unexpected waters, carried, in the eyes of ſome *Moabites*, a ſemblance of blood; a few eyes were enough to fill all ears with a falſe noiſe; the deceived ſenſe miſcarries the imagination. *This is blood, the kings are ſurely ſlain, and they have ſmitten one another;* now therefore, *Moab* to the ſpoil. Civil broils give juſt advantage to a common enemy; therefore muſt the camps be ſpoiled, becauſe the kings have ſmitten each other. Thoſe that ſhall be deceived are given over to credulity; the *Moabites* do not examine either the conceit or the report, but fly in confuſedly upon the camp of *Iſrael*, whom they find, too late, to have no enemies but themſelves; as if death would not have haſtened enough to them, they come to fetch it, they come to challenge it; it ſeizeth upon them unavoidably; they are ſmitten, their cities razed, their lands marred, their wells ſtopped, their trees felled, as if God meant to waſte them but once.

No onſets are ſo furious as the laſt aſſaults of the deſperate. The king of *Moab* now hopeleſs of recovery, would be glad to ſhut up with a pleaſing revenge; with ſeven hundred reſolute followers, he ruſhes into the battle towards the king of *Edom*, as

if he would bid death welcome, might he but carry with him that deſpited neighbour; and now, mad with the repulſe, he returns; and, whether as angry with his deſtiny, or as barbarouſly affecting to win his cruel gods with ſo dear a ſacrifice, he offers them, with his own hand, the blood of his eldeſt ſon in the ſight of *Iſrael*, and ſends him up in ſmoke to thoſe helliſh deities. O prodigious act, whether of rage or of devotion! What an hand hath Satan over his miſerable vaſſals! What marvel is it to ſee men ſacrifice their ſouls in an unfelt oblation, to theſe plauſible tempters, when their own fleſh and blood hath not been ſpared! There is no tyrant to the prince of darkneſs.

CONTEM. VII. ELISHA *with the* SHUNAMITE.

THE holy prophets under the Old Teſtament, did not abhor the marriage-bed; they did not think themſelves too pure for an inſtitution of their Maker. The diſtreſſed widow of one of the ſons of the prophets comes to *Eliſha* to bemoan her condition; her huſband is dead, and dead in debt; death hath no ſooner ſeized on him, than her two ſons, the remaining comfort of her life, are to be ſeized on, by his creditors, for bond-men. How thick did the miſeries of this poor afflicted woman light upon her! Her huſband is loſt, her eſtate clogged with debts, her children ready to be taken for ſlaves. Her huſband was a religious and worthy man; he paid his debts to nature, he could not to his creditors; they are cruel, and rake in the ſcarce-cloſed wound of her ſorrow, paſſing an arreſt worſe than death upon her ſons: widowhood, poverty, ſervitude, have conſpired to make her perfectly miſerable. Virtue and goodeſs can pay no debts. The holieſt man may be deep in arrearages, and break the bank; not through laviſhneſs, and riot

of

of expence, (religion teaches us to moderate our hands, to ſpend within the proportion of our eſtate) but through either iniquity of times, or evil caſualties. *Ahab* and *Jezebel* were lately in the throne, who can marvel that a prophet was in debt? It was well that any good man might have his breath free, tho' his eſtate were not: wilfully to overlaſh our ability, cannot ſtand with wiſdom and good government; but no Providence can guard us from croſſes. Holineſs is no more defence againſt debt, than againſt death. Grace can keep us from unthriftineſs, not from want. Whither doth the prophet's widow come to bewail her caſe, but to *Eliſha*. Every one would not be ſenſible of her affliction, or if they would pity, yet could not relieve her; *Eliſha* could do both; into his ear doth ſhe unload her griefs. It is no ſmall point of wiſdom to know where to plant our lamentation; otherways, inſtead of comfort, we may meet with ſcorn and inſultation.

None can ſo feelingly compaſſionate the hard terms of a prophet as an *Eliſha;* he finds that ſhe is not querulouſly impatient, expreſſing her ſorrow without murmuring and diſcontentment, making a loving and honourable mention of that huſband who had left her diſtreſſed; readily therefore doth he incline to her ſuccour. *What ſhall I do for thee? Tell me what haſt thou in thine houſe? Eliſha*, when he hears of her debts, aſks of her ſubſtance. Had her houſe been furniſhed with any valuable commodity, the prophet implies the neceſſity of ſelling it for ſatisfaction: our own abundance can ill ſtand with our engagement to others. It is great injuſtice for us to be full of others purſes: it is not our own which we owe to another; what is it other than a plauſible ſtealth to feed our riot with the want of the owner? He that could multiply her ſubſtance could know it: God and his prophet love to hear our neceſſities out of our

own mouths. *Thine hand-maid hath not any thing in the houſe, ſave a pot of oil.* It is neither news nor ſhame for a prophet to be poor; grief and want perhaps haſtened his end; both of them are left for the dowry of his careful widow. She had not complained, if there had been any poſſibility of remedy at home; baſhfulneſs had ſtopt her mouth thus long, and ſhould have done yet longer, if the exigence of her childrens ſervitude had not opened it. No want is ſo worthy of relief, as that which is loatheſt to come forth. *Then he ſaid, Go borrow thee veſſels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty veſſels, borrow not a few; and when thou art come in, thou ſhalt ſhut the door upon thee, and upon thy ſons, and ſhalt pour out into all thoſe veſſels, and thou ſhalt ſet aſide that which is full.*

She that owed much, and had nothing, yet muſt borrow more, that ſhe may pay all. Poverty had not ſo diſcredited her with her neighbours, that they ſhould doubt to lend her thoſe veſſels empty, which they had grudged full. Her want was too well known; it could not but ſeem ſtrange to the neighbours, to ſee this poor widow ſo buſily peſtering her houſe with empty tubs, which they knew ſhe had nothing to fill; they knew well enough, ſhe had neither field nor vineyard, nor orchard, and therefore muſt needs marvel at ſuch unprofitable diligence. If their curioſity would be inquiring after her intentions, ſhe is commanded ſecrecy. The doors muſt be ſhut upon herſelf, and her ſons, while the oil is increaſing. No eye ſhall ſee the miracle in working, enow ſhall ſee it, once wrought. This act was no leſs a proof of her faith, than an improvement of her eſtate; it was an exerciſe of her devotion, as well as of her diligence; it was fit her doors ſhould be ſhut, while her heart and lips were opened in an holy invocation. Out of one ſmall jar was poured out ſo much oil, as by a miracu-

miraculous multiplication filled all these empty casks. Scarce had that pot any bottom, at least the bottom that it had was to be measured by the brims of all those vessels; this was so deep, as they were high; could they have held more, this pot had not been empty. Even so the bounty of our God gives grace and glory, according to the capacity of the receiver; when he ceaseth to infuse, it is for want of room in the heart that takes it in; could we hold more, O God, thou wouldst give more: if there be any defect, it is in our vessels, not in thy beneficence. How did the heart of this poor widow run over, as with wonder, so with joy and thankfulness, to see such a river of oil rise out of so small a spring, to see all her vessels swimming full with so beneficial a liquor! Justly is she affected with this sight, she is not transported from her duty. I do not see her run forth into the street, and proclaim her store, nor calling in her neighbours, whether to admire or bargain; I see her running to the prophet's door, and gratefully acknowledging the favour, and humbly depending on his directions, as not daring to dispose of that which was so wonderfully given her, without the advice of him, by whose powerful means she had received it; her own reason might have sufficiently suggested what to do; she dares not trust it, but consults with the oracle of God. If we would walk surely, we must do nothing without a word; every action, every motion must have a warrant: we can no more err with this guide, than not err without him.

The prophet sets her in a right way; *Go sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live, thou, and thy children, on the rest.* The first care is of her debts, the next, of her maintenance. It should be gross injustice to raise means for herself, and her charge, ere she have discharged the arrearages of her husband. None of the oil was hers, till her creditors were satisfied;

tisfied; all was hers that remained. It is but ſtealth to enjoy a borrowed ſubſtance: while ſhe had nothing, it was no ſin to owe; but, when once her veſſels were full, ſhe could not have been guiltleſs, if ſhe had not paid, before ſhe ſtored. God and his prophets were bountiful; after the debt is paid, they provide not only againſt the thraldom of her charge, but againſt the want. It is the juſt care of a religious heart to defend the widow and children of a prophet from diſtreſs and penury.

Behold the true ſervant, and ſucceſſor of *Elijah!* what he did to the *Sareptan* widow, this did to the widow of a prophet. That increaſe of oil was by degrees, this at once; both equally miraculous; this ſo much more charitable, as it leſs concerned himſelf.

He that gives kindneſſes, doth by turns receive them. *Eliſha* hath relieved a poor woman, is relieved by a rich. The *Shunamite*, a religious and wealthy matron, invites him to her houſe; and now, after the firſt entertainment, finding his occaſions to call him to a frequent paſſage that way, moves her huſband to fit up, and furniſh a lodging for the man of God: it was his holineſs that made her deſirous of ſuch a gueſt; well might ſhe hope that ſuch an inmate would pay a bleſſing for his houſe-rent. O happy *Shunamite*, that might make herſelf the hoſteſs of *Eliſha!* As no leſs dutiful than godly, ſhe imparts her deſire to her huſband, whom her ſuit hath drawn into a partnerſhip in this holy hoſpitality; bleſſed of God is that man, whoſe bed yields him an help to heaven. The good *Shunamite* deſires not to harbour *Eliſha* in one of her wonted lodgings; ſhe ſolicits her huſband to build him a chamber on the wall apart; ſhe knew the tumult of a large family unfit for the quiet meditations of a prophet. Retiredneſs is moſt meet for the thought of a ſeer: neither

ther would ſhe bring the prophet to bare walls, but ſets ready for him a bed, a table, a ſtool, and a candleſtick, and whatever neceſſary utenſils for his entertainment. The prophet doth not affect delicacy; ſhe takes care to provide for his convenience. Thoſe that are truly pious and devout, think their houſes and their hands cannot be too open to the meſſengers of God, and are moſt glad to exchange their earthly commodities for the other's ſpiritual. Superfluity ſhould not fall within the care of a prophet, neceſſity muſt: he that could provide oil for the widow, could have provided all needful helps for himſelf. What room had there been for the charity and beneficence of others, if the prophet ſhould have always maintained himſelf out of power?

The holy man is ſo far ſociable, as not to neglect the friendly offer of ſo kind a benefactor: gladly does he take up his new lodging, and, as well pleaſed with ſo quiet a repoſe, and careful attendance, he ſends his ſervant *Gehazi* with the meſſage of his thanks, with a treaty of retribution; *Behold, thou haſt been careful for us, with all this care? what is to be done for thee? wouldſt thou be ſpoken for to the king, or to the captain of the hoſt?* An ingenuous diſpoſition cannot receive favours without thoughts of return. A wiſe debtor is deſirous to retribute in ſuch kind, as may be moſt acceptable to his obligers. Without this diſcretion, we may offer ſuch requitals as may ſeem goodly to us, to our friends, worthleſs: every one can chuſe beſt for himſelf. *Eliſha* therefore, who had never been wanting in ſpiritual duties to ſo hoſpitable a friend, gives the *Shunamite* the election of her ſuit, for temporal recompenſe alſo; no man can be a loſer by his favour to a prophet. It is good hearing that an *Eliſha* is in ſuch grace at the court; that he can promiſe himſelf acceſs to the king in a friend's ſuit: it was not ever thus: the time was,

was, when his maſter heard, *Haſt thou found me, O mine enemy!* Now, the late miracle which *Eliſha* wrought, in gratifying the three kings with water and victory, hath endeared him to the king of *Iſrael*; and now, who but *Eliſha?* Even that rough mantle finds reſpect amongſt thoſe ſilks and tiſſues. As bad as *Jehoram* was, yet he honoured the man of God. He that could not prevail with an idolatrous king, in a ſpiritual reformation, yet can carry a civil ſuit. Neither doth the prophet, in a ſullen diſcontentment, fly off from the court, becauſe he found his labours unprofitable, but ſtill holds good terms with that prince, whom he cannot reclaim, and will make uſe, notwithſtanding, of his countenance, in matters whether of courteſy, or juſtice. We may not caſt off our due reſpects even to faulty authority, but muſt ſtill ſubmit and perſiſt, where we are repelled. Not to his own advancement doth *Eliſha* deſire to improve the king's favour, but to the behoof, to the relief of others. If the *Shunamite* have buſineſs at the court, ſhe ſhall need no other ſolicitor. There cannot be a better office, nor more beſeeming a prophet, than to ſpeak in the cauſe of the dumb; to befriend the oppreſſed, to win greatneſs unto the protection of innocence.

The good matron needs no ſhelter of the great: *I dwell among mine own people;* as if ſhe ſaid, The courteſy is not ſmall in itſelf, but not uſeful to me: I live here quietly, in a contented obſcurity, out of the reach either of the glories, or cares of a court; free from wrongs, free from envies. Not ſo high as to provoke an evil eye, not ſo low as to be trodden on: I have neither fears nor ambitions, my neighbours are my friends, my friends are my protectors, and, if I ſhould be ſo unhappy, as to be the ſubject of main injuries, would not ſtick to be mine advocates:

vocates: this favour is for thoſe that either affect greatneſs, or groan under oppreſſion; I do neither, for *I live among my own people.* O *Shunamite*, thou ſhalt not eſcape envy! who can hear of thine happy condition, and not ſay, why am I not thus? If the world afford any perfect contentment, it is in a middle eſtate, equally diſtant from penury, from exceſs; it is in a calm freedom, a ſecure tranquillity, a ſweet fruition of ourſelves, of ours. But what hold is there of theſe earthly things? how long is the *Shunamite* thus bleſſed with peace? Stay but a while, you ſhall ſee her come on her knees to the king of *Iſrael*, pitifully complaining that ſhe was ſtripped of houſe and land; and now *Gehazi* is fain to do that good office for her, which was not accepted from his maſter. Thoſe, that ſtand faſteſt upon earth, have but ſlippery footing; no man can ſay that he ſhall not need friends.

Modeſty ſealed up the lips of the good *Shunamite*, ſhe was aſhamed to confeſs her longing: *Gehazi* eaſily gueſſed that her barrenneſs could not but be her affliction; ſhe was childleſs, her husband old; *Eliſha* gratifies her with the news of a ſon: *About this ſeaſon, according to the time of life, thou ſhalt embrace a ſon.* How liberal is God, by his prophet, in giving beyond her requeſts; not ſeldom doth his bounty over-reach our thoughts, and meet us with thoſe benefits which we thought too good for us to aſk. Greatneſs and inexpectation makes the bleſſing ſeem incredible; *Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie to thine handmaid.* We are never ſure enough of what we deſire; we are not more hard to believe, than loath to diſtruſt beneficial events: ſhe well knew the prophet's holineſs could not ſtand with wilful falſhood; perhaps ſhe might think it ſpoken by way of trial, not of ſerious affirmation: as unwilling therefore that it ſhould not be, and willing to hear that

pleaſing word ſeconded, ſhe ſays, *Do not lie to thine handmaid.* Promiſes are made good, not by iteration, but by the effect; the *Shunamite* conceives, and bears a ſon at the ſet ſeaſon: how glad a mother ſhe was, thoſe know beſt that have mourned under the diſcomfort of a ſad ſterility. The child grows up, and is now able to find out his father in the field, amongſt his reapers: his father now grew young again with the pleaſure of this ſight, and more joyed in this ſpring of his hopes, than in all the crops of his harveſt; but what ſtability is there in theſe earthly delights? The hot beams of the ſun beat upon that head which too much care had made tender and delicate; the child complains to his father of his pain; O that grace could teach us, what nature teaches infants, in all our troubles to bemoan ourſelves to our heavenly father! He ſends him to his mother; upon her lap, about noon, the child dies, as if he would return his ſoul into that boſom from which it was derived to him. The good *Shunamite* hath loſt her ſon, her faith ſhe had not loſt; paſſion hath not robbed her of her wiſdom: as not diſtracted with an accident ſo ſudden, ſo ſorrowful, ſhe lays the dead child upon the prophet's bed, ſhe locks the door, ſhe hides her grief, leaſt that conſternation might hinder her deſign; ſhe haſtens to her husband, and, as not daring to be other than officious in ſo diſtreſsful an occaſion, acquaints him with her journey, though not with the cauſe, requires of him both attendance and conveyance; ſhe poſts to *Mount Carmel;* ſhe cannot ſo ſoon find out the man of God as he hath found her, he ſees her afar off, and, like a faithful gueſt, ſends his ſervant haſtily to meet her, to inquire of the health of herſelf, her husband, her child: her errand was not to *Gehazi*, it was to *Eliſha;* no meſſenger ſhall interrupt her, no ear ſhall receive her complaint but the prophet's: down ſhe falls paſſionately at his feet, and, forgetting

getting the faſhion of her baſhful ſtrangeneſs, lays hold of them, whether in an humble veneration of his perſon, or in a fervent deſire of ſatisfaction. *Gehazi*, who well knew how uncouth, how unfit this geſture of ſalutation was for his maſter, offers to remove her, and admoniſheth her of her diſtance; the merciful prophet eaſily apprehends that no ordinary occaſion could ſo tranſport a grave and well-governed matron; as therefore pitying her unknown paſſion, he bids *Let her alone, for her ſoul is vexed within her, and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me.* If extremity of grief have made her unmannerly, wiſe and holy *Eliſha* knows how to pardon it; he dares not add ſorrow to the afflicted; he can better bear an unſeemlineſs in her greetings than cruelty in her moleſtation. Great was the familiarity that the prophet had with his God; and as friends are wont mutually to impart their councils to each other, ſo had the Lord done to him: *Eliſha* was not idle on *Mount Carmel;* what was it that he ſaw not from thence? not heaven only, but the world was before him. Yet the *Shunamite's* loſs is concealed from him, neither doth he ſhame to confeſs it: oft-times thoſe that know greater matters may yet be ignorant of the leſs. It is no diſparagement to any finite creature not to know ſomething. By her mouth will God tell the prophet, what by viſion he had not; *Then ſhe ſaid, Did I deſire a ſon of my Lord? did I not ſay, do not deceive me?* Deep ſorrow is ſparing of words: the expoſtulation could not be more ſhort, more quick, more pithy; had I begged a ſon, perhaps my importunity might have been yielded to in anger: too much deſire is juſtly puniſhed with loſs. It is no marvel if what we wring from God proſper not: this favour to me was of thine own motion; thy ſuit, O *Eliſha*, made me a mother; couldſt thou intend to torment me with a bleſſing! How much more eaſy had the want of a ſon been

been than the miſcarriage? barrenneſs than abortion? Was there no other end of my having a ſon, than that I might loſe him? O man of God let me not complain of a cruel kindneſs; thy prayers gave me a ſon, let thy prayers reſtore him; let not my dutiful reſpects to thee be repaid with an aggravation of miſery; give not thine handmaid cauſe to wiſh that I were but ſo unhappy as thou foundeſt me: O woful fruitfulneſs, if I muſt now ſay that I had a ſon!

I know not whether the mother or the prophet were more afflicted, the prophet for the mother's ſake, or the mother for her own. Not a word of reply do we hear from the mouth of *Eliſha*, his breath is only ſpent in the remedy; he ſends his ſervant with all ſpeed to lay his ſtaff upon the face of the child, charging him to avoid all the delays of the way. Had not the prophet ſuppoſed that ſtaff of his able to beat away death, why did he ſend it? and if upon that ſuppoſition he ſent it, how was it that it failed of effect? was this act done out of human conceit, not out of inſtinct from God, or did the want of the mother's faith hinder the ſucceſs of that cure? ſhe, not regarding the ſtaff, or the man, holds faſt to *Eliſha;* no hopes of his meſſage can looſe her fingers: *As the Lord liveth, and as thy ſoul liveth, I will not leave thee.* She imagined that the ſervant, the ſtaff, might be ſevered from *Eliſha;* ſhe knew that wherever the prophet was, there was power: it is good relying upon thoſe helps that cannot fail us.

Merit and importunity have drawn *Eliſha* from *Carmil* to *Shunem;* he finds his lodging taken up by that pale carcaſe, he ſhuts his door and falls to his prayers; this ſtaff of his, whatever became of the other, was long enough, he knew, to reach up to heaven, to knock at thoſe gates, yea to wrench them open: he applies his body to thoſe cold and ſenſeleſs limbs; by the fervour of his ſoul, he reduces that ſoul; by the heat

heat of his body, he educeth warmth out of that corps: the child ſneezeth ſeven times, and as if his ſpirit had been but hid for the time, not departed, it falls to work afreſh; the eyes look up, the lips and hands move. The mother is called in to receive a new life in her twice-given ſon; ſhe comes in, full of joy, full of wonder, and bows herſelf to the ground, and falls down before thoſe feet which ſhe had ſo boldly laid hold of in *Carmel.* O ſtrong faith of the *Shunamite,* that could not be diſcouraged with the ſeizure and continuance of death; raiſing up her heart ſtill to an expectation of that life, which to the eyes of nature had been impoſſible, irrevocable! O infinite goodneſs of the Almighty, that would not ſuffer ſuch faith to be fruſtrated, that would rather reverſe the laws of nature, in returning a gueſt from heaven, and raiſing a corps from death, than the confidence of a believing heart ſhould be diſappointed.

How true an heir is *Eliſha* of his maſter, not in his graces only, but in his actions! Both of them divided the waters of *Jordan,* the one as his laſt act, the other as his firſt: *Elijah*'s curſe was the death of the captains and their troops; *Eliſha*'s curſe was the death of the children: *Elijah* rebuked *Ahab* to his face; *Eliſha, Jehoram: Elijah* ſupplied the drought of *Iſrael,* by rain from heaven; *Eliſha* ſupplied the drought of the three kings, by waters guſhing out of the earth: *Elijah* increaſed the oil of the *Sareptan, Eliſha* increaſed the oil of the prophet's widow: *Elijah* raiſed from death the *Sareptan*'s ſon; *Eliſha,* the *Shunamite*'s: both of them had one mantle, one ſpirit; both of them climbed up one *Carmel,* one heaven.

CONTEM. VIII. ELISHA *with* NAAMAN.

OF the full ſhowers of grace which fell upon *Iſrael* and *Judah,* yet ſome drops did light upon their

their neighbours. If *Iſrael* be the worſe for her nearneſs to *Syria*, *Syria* is the better for the vicinity of *Iſrael*. Amongſt the worſt of God's enemies, ſome are ſingled out for mercy. *Naaman* was a great warriour, an honourable courtier, yet a leper; no diſeaſe incident to the body is ſo naſty, ſo loathſome as leproſy. Greatneſs can ſecure no man from the moſt odious and weariſome condition. How little pleaſure did this *Syrian* peer take to be ſtooped to by others, while he hated to ſee himſelf? Even thoſe that honoured him avoided him, neither was he other than abhorred of thoſe that flattered him; yea his hand could not move to his mouth, without his own deteſtation; the baſeſt ſlave of *Syria* would not change ſkins with him, if he might have his honour to boot: thus hath the wiſe God thought meet to ſauce the valour, dignity, renown, victories of the famous general of the *Syrians*. Seldom ever was any man ſerved with ſimple favours; theſe compoſitions make both our croſſes tolerable, and our bleſſings wholeſome.

The body of *Naaman* was not more tainted with his leproſy, than his ſoul was tainted with *Rimmon*, and, beſides his idolatry, he was a profeſſed enemy to *Iſrael*, and ſucceſsful in his enmity. How far doth God fetch about his purpoſes? The leproſy, the hoſtility of *Naaman*, ſhall be the occaſions of his ſalvation; that leproſy ſhall make his ſoul ſound, that hoſtility ſhall adopt him a ſon of God: in ſome proſperous in-roads that the *Syrians*, under *Naaman*'s conduct, have made into the land of *Iſrael*, a little maid is taken captive, ſhe ſhall attend on *Naaman*'s wife, and ſhall ſuggeſt to her miſtreſs the miraculous cures of *Eliſha*. A ſmall chink may ſerve to let in much light; her report finds credit in the court, and begets both a letter from the king, and a journey of his peer. While the *Syrians* thought of nothing but their booty, they bring happineſs to the houſe of *Naaman*: the captivity

captivity of a poor *Hebrew* girl is a means to make the greateſt lord of *Syria* a ſubject to God: it is good to acquaint our children with the works of God, with the praiſes of his prophets. Little do we know how they may improve this knowledge, and whither they may carry it; perhaps the remoteſt nations may light their candle at their coal; even the weakeſt intimations may not be neglected; a child, a ſervant, a ſtranger may ſay that which we may bleſs God to have heard. How well did it become the mouth of an *Iſraelite* to extol a prophet, to wiſh the cure of her maſter, though an *Aramite*, to adviſe that journey unto the man of God, by whom both body and ſoul might be cured? True religion teacheth us pious and charitable reſpects to our governors, though aliens from the commonwealth of God.

No man that I hear blames the credulity of *Naaman;* upon no other ground doth the king of *Syria* ſend his chief peer, with his letters to the king of *Iſrael,* from his hands requiring the cure: the *Syrian* ſuppoſed, that whatever a ſubject could do, a ſovereign might command; that ſuch a prophet could neither be out of the knowledge, nor out of the obedience to his prince; never did he dream of any exemption, but imagining *Jehoram* to be no leſs a king of prophets than of people, and *Eliſha* no leſs a ſubject than a ſeer, he writes; *Now when this letter is come to thee, behold I have herewith ſent* Naaman *my ſervant to thee, that thou mayſt recover him of his leproſy.* Great is the power of princes; every man's hand is theirs, whether for ſkill, or for ſtrength: beſides the eminency of their own gifts, all the ſubordinate excellencies of their ſubjects are no leſs at their ſervice, than if they were inherent in their perſons. Great men are wanting to their own perfections, if they do not both know, and exerciſe the graces of their inferiors.

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The king of *Iſrael* cannot read the letter without amazement of heart, without rending of garments, and ſays, *Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man ſends to me, to recover a man of his leproſy? wherefore conſider, and ſee, I pray you, how he ſeeketh a quarrel againſt me?* If God have vouchſafed to call kings gods, it well becomes kings to call themſelves men; and to confeſs the diſtance wherein they ſtand to their Maker. Man may kill, man cannot kill and make alive; yea, of himſelf, he can do neither; with God, a worm, or a fly may kill a man; without God, no potentate can do it; much leſs can any created power both kill and revive; ſince to reſtore life is more than to bereave it, more than to continue it, more than to give it; and if leproſy be a death, what human power can either inflict or cure it? It is a trouble to a well affected heart to receive impoſſible commands; to require that of an inferior which is proper to the Higheſt, is a derogation from that ſupreme power whoſe property it is. Had *Jehoram* been truly religious, the injury done to his Maker, in this motion, as he took it, had more afflicted him, than the danger of his own quarrel. Belike, *Eliſha* was not in the thoughts of the king of *Iſrael;* he might have heard, that this prophet had made alive one whom he killed not. Himſelf, with the two other kings, had been eye-witneſſes of what *Eliſha* could do; yet now the calves of *Dan* and *Bethel* have ſo often taken up his heart, that there is no room for the memory of *Eliſha;* whom he ſued to in his extremity, now his proſperity hath forgotten. Carnal hearts, when need drives them, can think of God and his prophet; when their turn is ſerved, can as utterly neglect them, as if they were not.

Yet cannot good *Eliſha* repay neglect and forgetfulneſs. He liſtens what is done at the court, and finding

finding the diſtreſs of his ſovereign, proffers that ſervice, which ſhould have been required; *Wherefore haſt thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he ſhall know that there is a prophet in* Iſrael. It was no ſmall fright from which *Eliſha* delivers his king. *Jehoram* was in awe of the *Syrians*, ever ſince their laſt victory, wherein his father *Ahab* was ſlain, *Iſrael* and *Judah* diſcomfited: nothing was more dreadful to him, than the frowns of theſe *Aramites*. The quarrel, which he ſuſpected to be hatched by them, is cleared by *Eliſha;* their leper ſhall be healed; both they and *Iſrael* ſhall know, they have neglected a God, whoſe prophet can do wonders. Many eyes, doubtleſs, are faſtened upon the iſſue of this meſſage. But what ſtate is this that *Eliſha* takes upon him: he doth not ſay, *I will come to him;* but, *Let him come now to me.* The three kings came down once to his tent; it is no marvel, if he prevent not the journey of a *Syrian* courtier. It well beſeems him that will be a ſuiter for favour, to be obſequious: we may not ſtand upon terms of our labour or dignity, where we expect a benefit. *Naaman* comes richly attended with his troops of ſervants and horſes, and waits in his chariot at the door of a prophet. I do not hear *Eliſha* call him in; for though he were great, yet he was leprous; neither do I ſee *Eliſha* come forth to him, and receive him with ſuch outward courteſies, as might be fit for an honourable ſtranger: for in thoſe rich clothes the prophet ſaw an *Aramite*, and, perhaps, ſome tincture of the late-ſhed blood of *Iſrael*. Rather, that he might make a perfect trial of the humility of that man, whom he means to gratify and honour, after ſome ſhort attendance at his door, he ſends his ſervant with a meſſage to that peer, who could not but think the

meaneſt of his retinue a better man than *Gehazi*'s maſter.

What could the prophet have done other to the lackey of *Naaman*'s man? He, that would be a meet ſubject of mercy, muſt be thoroughly abaſed in his own conceit, and muſt be willingly pliable to all the conditions of his humiliation. Yet, had the meſſage carried in it either reſpect to the perſon, or probability of effect, it could not have been unwelcome: but now it ſounded of nothing but ſullenneſs and unlikelihood; *Go and waſh in* Jordan *ſeven times, and thy fleſh ſhall come again to thee, and thou ſhalt be clean.* What wiſe man could take this for any other than a mere ſcorn, and mockery? *Go, waſh.* Alas, what can water do? it can cleanſe from filthineſs, not from leproſy: and why in *Jordan?* what differs that from other ſtreams? and why juſt ſeven times? what virtue is either in that channel, or in that number? *Naaman* can no more put off nature than leproſy. In what a chafe did he fling away from the prophet's door, and ſay, Am I come thus far to fetch a flout from an *Iſraelite?* is this the iſſue both of my journey, and the letters of my king? could this prophet find no man to play upon but *Naaman?* had he meant ſeriouſly, why did he think himſelf too good to come forth unto me? why did he not touch me with his hand, and bleſs with his prayers, and cure me with his bleſſing? Is my miſery fit for his deriſion? If water could do it, what needed I to come ſo far for this remedy? have I not oft done thus in vain? have we not better ſtreams at home, than any *Iſrael* can afford? *are not* Abana *and* Pharphar, *rivers of* Damaſcus, *better than all the waters of* Iſrael? Folly and pride ſtrive for place in a natural heart, and it is hard to ſay whether is more predominant: folly in meaſuring the power of God's ordinances by the rule of human

human diſcourſe and ordinary event; pride, in a ſcornful valuation of the inſtitutions of God, in compariſon of our own devices. *Abana* and *Pharphar*, two for one; rivers, not waters, of *Damaſcus*, a ſtately city, and incomparable; are they not? Who dares deny it? better, not as good, than the waters, not the rivers; all the waters, *Jordan*, and all the reſt of *Iſrael*, a beggarly region to *Damaſcus*. Nowhere ſhall we find a truer pattern of the diſpoſition of nature; how ſhe is altogether led by ſenſe and reaſon, how ſhe fondly judges of all objects by the appearance, how ſhe acquaints herſelf only with the common road of God's proceedings, how ſhe ſticks to her own principles, how ſhe miſconſtrues the intentions of God, how ſhe over-conceits her own, how ſhe diſdains the mean conditions of others, how ſhe upbraids her oppoſites with the proud compariſon of her own privileges.

Nature is never but like herſelf. No marvel, if carnal minds deſpiſe the fooliſhneſs of preaching, the ſimplicity of ſacraments, the homelineſs of ceremonies, the ſeeming inefficacy of cenſures. Theſe men look upon *Jordan* with *Syrian* eyes, one drop of whoſe water, ſet apart by divine ordination, hath more virtue than all the ſtreams of *Abana* and *Pharphar*.

It is a good matter for a man to be attended with wiſe and faithful followers. Many a one hath had better counſel from his heels, than from his elbows. *Naaman*'s ſervants were his beſt friends, they came to him, and ſpake to him, and ſaid, *My father, if the prophet had bid thee do ſome great thing, wouldſt thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he ſaith to thee, Waſh, and be clean.* Theſe men were ſervants, not of the humour, but of the profit of their maſter. Some ſervile ſpirits would have cared only to ſooth up, not to benefit their governor, and would have encouraged his rage by their

own; Sir, will you take this at the hand of a base fellow? was ever man thus flouted? wil you let him carry it away thus? is any harmless anger sufficient revenge for such an insolence? Give us leave at least to pull him out by the ears, and force him to do that by violence, which he would not do out of good manners: let our fingers teach this saucy prophet, what it is to offer an affront to a prince of *Syria*. But these men loved more their master's health than his passion; and had rather therefore to advise, than flatter; to draw him to good, than follow him to evil: since it was a prophet from whom he received this prescription, they persuade him not to despise it; intimating, there could be no fault in the slightness of the receipt, so long as there was no defect of power in the commander; that the virtue of the cure should be in his obedience, not in the nature of the remedy. They persuade and prevail. Next to the prophet, *Naaman* may thank his servants, that he is not a leper. He goes down, upon their entreaty, and dips seven times in *Jordan*, his flesh riseth, his leprosy vanisheth. Not the unjust fury and techiness of the patient shall cross the cure; lest, while God is severe, the prophet should be discredited. Long enough might *Naaman* have washed there in vain, if *Elisha* had not sent him. Many a leper hath bathed in that stream, and hath come forth no less impure. It is the word, the ordinance of the Almighty which puts efficacy into those means, which of themselves are both impotent and improbable. What can our font do to the washing away of sin? If God's institution shall put virtue into our *Jordan*, it shall scour off the spiritual leprosies of our hearts, and shall more cure the soul, than cleanse the face.

How joyful is *Naaman* to see this change of his skin, this renovation of his flesh, of his life! never did

did his heart find ſuch warmth of inward gladneſs, as in this ſtream.

Upon the ſight of his recovery, he doth not poſt home to the court, or to his family, to call for witneſſes, for partners of his joy, but thankfully returns to the prophet, by whoſe means he received this mercy: he comes back with more contentment, than he departed with rage. Now will the man of God be ſeen of that recovered *Syrian*, whom he would not ſee leprous: his preſence ſhall be yielded to the gratulation, which was not yielded to the ſuit. Purpoſely did *Eliſha* forbear before, that he might ſhare no part of the praiſe of this work with his Maker, that God might be ſo much more magnified, as the means were more weak and deſpicable. The miracle hath its due work. Firſt, doth *Naaman* acknowledge the God that wrought it, then the prophet by whom he wrought it. *Behold, now I know there is no god in all the earth, but in* Iſrael. O happy *Syrian*, that was at once cured of his leproſy, and his miſpriſion of God! *Naaman* was too wiſe, to think that either the water had cured him, or the man; he ſaw a divine power working in both, ſuch as he vainly ſought from his heathen deities; with the heart therefore he believes, with the mouth he confeſſes.

While he is thus thankful to the Author of his cure, he is not unmindful of the inſtrument. *Now therefore, I pray thee, take a bleſſing of thy ſervant.* *Naaman* came richly furniſhed with ten talents of ſilver, ſix thouſand pieces of gold, ten changes of raiment: all theſe, and many more, would the *Syrian* peer have gladly given to be delivered from ſo noiſome a diſeaſe: no marvel if he importunately offer ſome part of them to the prophet, now that he is delivered; ſome teſtimony of thankfulneſs did well, where all earthly recompenſe was too ſhort. The hands of this man were no leſs full of thanks than his mouth,

mouth. Dry and barren profeſſions of our obligations, where is power to requite, are unfit for noble and ingenuous ſpirits.

Naaman is not more frank in offering his gratuity, than *Eliſha* vehement in refuſing it, *As the Lord liveth, before whom I ſtand, I will receive none.* Not that he thought the *Syrian* gold impure; not that he thought it unlawful to take up a gift, where he hath laid down a benefit: but the prophet will remit of *Naaman*'s purſe, that he may win of his ſoul. The man of God would have his new convert ſee cauſe to be more enamoured of true piety, which teacheth her clients to contemn thoſe worldly riches and glories which baſe worldlings adore; and would have him think, that theſe miraculous powers are ſo far tranſcending the valuation of all earthly pelf, that thoſe glittering treaſures are worthy of nothing but contempt, in reſpect thereof. Hence it is, that he, who refuſed not the *Shunamite*'s table, and ſtool, and candleſtick, will not take *Naaman*'s preſent. There is much uſe of godly diſcretion in directing us when to open, when to ſhut our hands.

He, that will not be allowed to give, deſires yet to take. *Shall there not, I pray thee, be given to thy ſervant two mules load of earth? for thy ſervant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor ſacrifice to other gods, but unto the Lord. Iſraelitiſh* mould lay open to his carriage, without leave of *Eliſha*; but *Naaman* regards not to take it, unleſs it may be given him, and given him by the prophet's hand. Well did this *Syrian* find that the man of God had given a ſupernatural virtue to the water of *Iſrael*; and therefore ſuppoſed he might give the like to his earth; neither would any earth ſerve him but *Eliſha*'s, elſe the mould of *Iſrael* had been more properly craved of the king, than the prophet of *Iſrael*.

Doubtleſs

Doubtleſs it was devotion that moved this ſuit. The *Syrian* ſaw God had a propriety in *Iſrael*, and imagines that he will be beſt pleaſed with his own. On the ſudden was *Naaman* half a proſelyte; ſtill here was a weak knowledge with ſtrong intentions: he will ſacrifice to the Lord, but where? in *Syria*, not in *Jeruſalem*: not the mould, but the altar is what God reſpects, which he hath allowed no where but in his choſen *Sion*. This honeſt *Syrian* will be removing God home to his country; he ſhould have reſolved to remove his home to God: and though he vows to offer no ſacrifice to any other god, yet he craves leave to offer an outward courteſy to *Rimmon*, though not for the idol's ſake, yet for his maſter's. *In this thing the Lord pardon thy ſervant, that when my maſter goeth into the houſe of* Rimmon *to worſhip there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myſelf in the houſe of* Rimmon, *the Lord pardon thy ſervant in this thing.* *Naaman* goes away reſolute to profeſs himſelf an *Iſraelite* for religion; all the *Syrian* court ſhall know that he ſacrifices upon *Iſraelitiſh* earth to the God of *Iſrael*: they ſhall hear him proteſt to have neither heart nor knee for *Rimmon*. If he muſt go into the houſe of that idol, it ſhall be as a ſervant, not as a ſupplicant; his duty to his maſter ſhall carry him, not his devotion, to his maſter's god; if his maſter go to worſhip there, not he; neither doth he ſay, *When I bow myſelf to the image of* Rimmon, but, *in the houſe*: he ſhall bow to be leaned upon, not to adore: yet had not *Naaman* thought this a fault, he had not craved a pardon; his heart told him, that a perfect convert ſhould not have abode the roof, the ſight, the air of *Rimmon*; that his obſervance of an earthly maſter ſhould not draw him to the ſemblance of an act of outward obſervance to the rival of his Maſter in heaven, that a ſincere deteſta-

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tion of idolatry could not ſtand with ſo unſeaſonable a courteſy.

Far therefore is *Naaman* from being a pattern, ſave of weakneſs; ſince he is yet more than half a *Syrian*; ſince he willingly accuſes himſelf, and, inſtead of defending, deprecates his offence. It is not for us to expect a full ſtature in the cradle of converſion. As nature, ſo grace riſes, by many degrees, to perfection. Leproſy was in *Naaman* cured at once, not corruption.

The prophet, as glad to ſee him but thus forward, diſmiſſes him with a civil valediction. Had an *Iſraelite* made this ſuit, he had been anſwered with a check. Thus much from a *Syrian* was worthy of a kind farewell; they are parted.

Gehazi cannot thus take his leave; his heart is mauled up in the rich cheſts of *Naaman*, and now he goes to fetch it. The prophet and his man had not looked with the ſame eyes upon the *Syrian* treaſure; the one with the eye of contempt, the other with the eye of admiration and covetous deſire. The diſpoſition of the maſter may not be meaſured by the mind, by the act of his ſervant. Holy *Eliſha* may be attended by a falſe *Gehazi*: no examples, no counſels, will prevail with ſome hearts. Who would not have thought, that the follower of *Eliſha* could be no other than a ſaint? yet, after the view of all thoſe miracles, this man is a mirror of worldlineſs. He thinks his maſter either too ſimple, or too kind, to refuſe ſo juſt a preſent from a *Syrian*; himſelf will be more wiſe, more frugal. Deſire haſtens his pace, he doth not go, but run after his booty: *Naaman* ſees him, and, as true nobleneſs is ever courteous, alights from his chariot to meet him. The great lord of *Syria* comes forth of his coach to ſalute a prophet's ſervant; not fearing that he can humble himſelf overmuch to one of *Eliſha*'s family. He greets *Gehazi* with the ſame word wherewith

wherewith he was lately demitted by his maſter: *Is it peace?* So ſudden a meſſenger might ſeem to argue ſome change. He ſoon receives, from the breathleſs bearer, news of his maſter's health and requeſt: *All is well; my maſter hath ſent me, ſaying, Behold, even now there be come to me, from mount* Ephraim, *two young men of the ſons of the prophets: give me, I pray thee, a talent of ſilver, and two changes of garments.* Had *Gehazi* craved a reward in his own name, calling for the fee of the prophet's ſervant, as the gain, ſo the offence had been the leſs; now, reaching at a greater ſum, he belies his maſter, robs *Naaman*, burdens his own ſoul. What a round tale hath the craft of *Gehazi* deviſed, of the number, the place, the quality, the age of his maſter's gueſts, that he might ſet a fair colour upon that pretended requeſt, ſo proportioning the value of his demand, as might both enrich himſelf, and yet well ſtand with the moderation of his maſter? Love of money can never keep good quarter with honeſty, with innocence. Covetouſneſs never lodged in the heart alone; if it find not, it will breed wickedneſs. What a mint of fraud there is in a worldly breaſt! how readily can it coin ſubtile falſhood for an advantage!

How thankfully liberal was this noble *Syrian! Gehazi* could not be more eager in taking, than he was in giving; as glad of ſo happy an occaſion of leaving any piece of his treaſure behind him, he forces two talents upon the ſervant of *Eliſha*, and binds them in two bags, and lays them upon two of his own ſervants; his own train ſhall yield porters to *Gehazi*. Cheerfulneſs is the juſt praiſe of our beneficence. Bountiful minds are as zealous in over-paying good turns, as the niggardly are in ſcanting retributions.

What projects do we think *Gehazi* had all the way? how did he pleaſe himſelf with the waking dreams of purchaſes, of traffic, of jollity? and now, when they are come to the tower, he gladly diſburdens and diſmiſſes his two *Syrian* attendants, and hides their load, and wipes his mouth, and ſtands boldly before that maſter whom he had ſo foully abuſed. O *Gehazi*, where didſt thou think God was this while! Couldſt thou thus long pour water upon the hands of *Eliſha*, and be either ignorant or regardleſs of that undeceivable eye of Providence, which was ever fixed upon thy hands, thy tongue, thy heart? couldſt thou thus hope to blind the eyes of a ſeer? Hear then thy indictment, thy ſentence, from him whom thou thoughtſt to have mocked with thy concealment; *Whence comeſt thou*, Gehazi? *Thy ſervant went no whither.* He, that had begun a lie to *Naaman*, ends it to his maſter: whoſo lets his tongue once looſe to a wilful untruth, ſoon grows impudent in multiplying falſhoods. Of what metal is the forehead of that man, that dares lie to a prophet? what is this but to out-face the ſenſes? *Went not my heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?* Didſt thou not, till now, know, O *Gehazi*, that prophets have ſpiritual eyes, which are not confined to bodily proſpects! didſt thou not know that their hearts were often where they were not? didſt thou not know that thy ſecreteſt ways were over-looked by inviſible witneſſes? Hear then, and be convinced: hither thou wentſt, thus thou ſaidſt, thus thou didſt, thus thou ſpedſt. What anſwer was now here but confuſion? Miſerable *Gehazi*, how didſt thou ſtand pale and trembling before the dreadful tribunal of thy ſevere maſter, looking for the woful ſentence of ſome grievous judgment for ſo heinous an offence! *Is this a time*

time to receive money, and to receive garments, and (which thou hadſt already purchaſed in thy conceit) olive-yards, and vineyards, and ſheep, and oxen, and men-ſervants, and maid-ſervants? Did my mouth refuſe, that thy hands might take? Was I ſo careful to win honour to my God, and credit to my profeſſion, by denying theſe *Syrian* preſents, that thou mightſt daſh both in receiving them? was there no way to enrich thyſelf, but by belying thy maſter, by diſparaging this holy function in the eyes of a new convert? Since thou wouldſt needs therefore take part of *Naaman*'s treaſure, take part with him in his leproſy; *The leproſy of* Naaman *ſhall cleave unto thee, and unto thy ſeed for ever.* O heavy talents of *Gehazi!* O the horror of this one unchangeable ſuit, which ſhall never be but loathſomely white, noiſomely unclean! How much better had been a light purſe and an homely coat, with a ſound body, a clear ſoul! Too late doth that wretched man now find, that he hath loaded himſelf with a curſe, that he hath clad himſelf with ſhame: his ſin ſhall be read ever in his face, in his ſeed: all paſſengers, all poſterities ſhall now ſay, Behold the characters of *Gehazi*'s covetouſneſs, fraud, ſacrilege! The act overtakes the word: *He went out of his preſence a leper as white as ſnow.* It is a woful exchange that *Gehazi* hath made with *Naaman; Naaman* came a leper, returned a diſciple; *Gehazi* came a diſciple, returned a leper: *Naaman* left behind both his diſeaſe and his money; *Gehazi* takes up both his money and his diſeaſe. Now ſhall *Gehazi* never look upon himſelf, but he ſhall think of *Naaman*, whoſe ſkin is transferred upon him with thoſe talents, and ſhall wear out the reſt of his days in ſhame, in pain and ſorrow. His tears may waſh off the guilt of his ſin, but ſhall not, like another *Jordan*, waſh off his leproſy, that ſhall ever remain as an hereditary monument of divine ſeverity. This

ſon of the prophet ſhall more loudly and lively preach the juſtice of God by his face, than others by their tongue. Happy was it for him, if, while his ſkin was ſnow-white with leproſy, his humbled ſoul was waſhed white as ſnow with the water of true repentance.

CONTEM. IX. ELISHA *raiſing the iron, blinding the* ASSYRIANS.

THERE was no loſs of *Gehazi*, when he was gone the prophets increaſed: an ill man in the church is but like ſome ſhrubby tree in a garden, whoſe ſhade keeps better plants from growing: a blank doth better in a room than an ill filling. The view of God's juſt judgments doth rather draw clients unto him, than alienate them. The kings of *Iſrael* had ſucceeded in idolatry and hate of ſincere religion, yet the prophets multiply: perſecution enlargeth the bounds of the church. Theſe very tempeſtuous ſhowers bring up flowers and herbs in abundance. There would have been neither ſo many, nor ſo zealous prophets in the languiſhment of peace. Beſides, what marvel is it, if the immediate ſucceſſion of two ſuch noble leaders, as *Elijah* and *Eliſha*, eſtabliſhed and augmented religion, and bred multitudes of prophets? rather who can marvel, upon the knowledge of all their miracles, that all *Iſrael* did not propheſy? It is a good hearing that the prophets want elbow-room out of their ſtore, not out of the envy of neighbours, or incompetency of proviſion: where viſion fails, the people periſh; they are bleſſed where it abounds.

When they found themſelves ſtraitened, they did not preſume to carve for themſelves, but they craved the leave, the council of *Eliſha; Let us go, we pray thee, unto* Jordan, *and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place where we may dwell: and he*

he ſaid, Go ye. It well becomes the ſons of the prophets to enterprize nothing without the allowance of their ſuperiors. Here was a building towards none of the curiouſeſt; I do not ſee them making means for the procurement of ſome cunning artificers, nor for the conquiſition of ſome coſtly marbles and cedars, but every man ſhall hew and ſquare, and frame his own beam. No nice terms were ſtood upon by theſe ſons of the prophets; their thoughts were fixed upon the perfection of a ſpiritual building: as an homely roof may ſerve them, ſo their own hands ſhall raiſe it. The fingers of theſe contemplative men did not ſcorn the ax, and mallet, and chiſel: it was better being there than in *Obadiah*'s cave; and they, that dwell now contentedly under rude ſticks, will not refuſe the ſquared ſtones, and poliſhed contignations of better times. They ſhall be ill teachers of others, that have not learned both to want, and to abound.

The maſter of this ſacred ſociety, *Eliſha*, is not ſtately, nor auſtere; he gives not only paſſage to this motion of his collegiates, but aſſiſtance. It was fit the ſons of the prophets ſhould have convenience of dwelling, though not pomp, not coſtlineſs. They fall to their work, no man goes ſlackly about the building of his own houſe. One of them, more regarding the tree than the tool, lets fall the head of the ax into the river: poor men are ſenſible of ſmall loſſes; he makes his moan to *Eliſha*, *Alas, maſter, for it was borrowed.* Had the ax been his own, the trouble had been the leſs to forgo it; therefore doth the miſcarriage afflict him, becauſe it was of a borrowed ax. Honeſt minds are more careful of what they have by loan than by propriety. In lending there is a truſt, which a good heart cannot diſappoint without vexation. Alas, poor novices of the prophet, they would be building, and were not worth their axes; if they would

would give their labour, they must borrow their instruments.

Their wealth was spiritual; outward poverty may well stand with inward riches: he is rich, not that hath the world, but that can contemn it.

Elisha loves and cherishes this just simplicity; rather will he work a miracle, than a borrowed ax shall not be restored. It might easily be imagined, he that could raise up the iron out of the bottom of the water, could tell where it fell in; yet even that powerful hand calls for direction. In this one point the son of the prophet knows more than *Elisha*. The notice of particularities is neither fit for a creature, nor communicable: a mean man may best know his own case: this novice better knows where his ax fell, than his master; his master knows better how to get it out than he. There is no reason to be given of supernatural actions: the prophet borrows an ax to cut an helve for the lost ax, why did he not make use of that handle which had cast the head? Did he hold it unworthy of respect, for that it had abandoned the metal wherewith it was trusted? or did he make choice of a new stick, that the miracle might be the more clear and unquestionable? Divine power goes a contrary way to art: we first would have procured the head of the ax, and then would have fitted it with an helve: *Elisha* fits the head to the helve, and causeth the wood, which was light, and knew not how to sink, to fetch up the iron, which was heavy, and naturally incapable of supernatation. Whether the metal were stripped of the natural weight, by the same power which gave it being, or whether retaining the wonted poize, it was raised by some spiritual operation, I inquire not; only, I see it swim like cork upon the stream of *Jordan*, and move towards the hand that lost it. What creature is not willing to put off the properties of nature, at the command of the God of

of nature! O God, how eaſy is it for thee, when this hard and heavy heart of mine is ſunk down into the mud of the world, to fetch it up again by thy mighty word, and cauſe it to float upon the ſtreams of life, and to ſee the face of heaven again!

Yet ſtill do the ſides of *Iſrael* complain of the thorns of *Aram:* the children of *Ahab* rue their father's unjuſt mercy. From an enemy, it is no making queſtion whether of ſtrength or wile. The king of *Syria* conſults with his ſervants, where to encamp for his greateſt advantage; their opinion is not more required than their ſecrecy. *Eliſha* is a thouſand ſcouts; he ſends word to the king of *Iſrael* of the projects, of the removes of his enemy: more than once had *Jehoram* ſaved both his life, and his hoſt, by theſe cloſe admonitions: it is well, that in ſomething yet a prophet may be obeyed. What ſtrange ſtate-ſervice was this which *Eliſha* did, beſides the ſpiritual? The king, the people of *Iſrael* owe themſelves, and their ſafety, to a deſpiſed prophet. The man of God knew, and felt them idolaters; yet how careful and vigilant is he for their reſcue! If they were bad, yet they were his own; if they were bad, yet not all; God had his number amongſt their worſt: if they were bad, yet the *Syrians* were worſe. The *Iſraelites* miſ-worſhipped the true God, the *Syrians* worſhipped a falſe; that, if it were poſſible, he might win them, he will preſerve them; and, if they will needs be wanting to God, yet *Eliſha* will not be wanting to them. Their impiety ſhall not make him undutiful.

There cannot be a juſter cauſe of diſpleaſure, than the diſcloſing of thoſe ſecret counſels which are laid up in our ear, in our breaſt. The king of *Syria*, not without reaſon, ſtomachs this ſuppoſed treachery. What prince can bear, that an adverſe power ſhould have a party, a penſionary in his own court? How famous

famous was *Eliſha*, even in foreign regions? Beſides *Naaman*, others of the *Syrian* nobility take notice of the miraculous faculties of this prophet of *Iſrael*. He is accuſed for this ſecret intelligence. No words can eſcape him, though ſpoken in the bed-chamber. O *Syrian!* whoſoever thou wert, thou ſaidſt not enough: if thy maſter do but whiſper in thine ear, if he ſmother his words within his own lips, if he do but ſpeak within his own boſom, *Eliſha* knows it from an infallible information. What counſel is it, O God, that can be hid from thee! what counſel is it that thou wilt hide from thy ſeer! Even this very word, that accuſed the prophet, is known to the accuſed. He hears this tale while it is in telling; he hears the plot for his apprehenſion. How ill do the projects of wicked men hang together! They, that confeſs *Eliſha* knows their ſecreteſt words, do yet confer to take him. There are ſpies upon him, whoſe eſpials have moved their anger and admiration. He is deſcried to be in *Dothan*, a ſmall town of *Manaſſeh*'s. A whole army is ſent thither to ſurpriſe him: the opportunity of the night is choſen for the exploit. There ſhall be no want either in the number, or valour, or ſecrecy of theſe conſpired troops: and now, when they have fully girt in the village with a ſtrong and exquiſite ſiege, they make themſelves ſure of *Eliſha*, and pleaſe themſelves to think, how they have incaged the miſerable prophet; how they ſhould take him at unawares in his bed, in the midſt of a ſecure dream; how they ſhould carry him fettered to their king; what thanks they ſhould have for ſo welcome a priſoner.

The ſucceſſor of *Gehazi* riſeth early in the morning, and ſeeth all the city encompaſſed with a fearful hoſt of foot, horſe, chariots; his eyes could meet with nothing but woods of pikes, and walls of harneſs, and luſtre of metals; and now he runs in affrighted

to

to his maſter, *Alas, my maſter, what ſhall we do?* He had day enough to ſee they were enemies that environed them, to ſee himſelf helpleſs and deſperate; and hath only ſo much life left in him, as to lament himſelf to the partner of his miſery. He cannot fly from his new maſter, if he would; he runs to him with a woful clamour, *Alas, my maſter, what ſhall we do?*

O the undaunted courage of faith! *Eliſha* ſees all this, and ſits in his chamber ſo ſecure, as if theſe had only been the guard of *Iſrael*, for his ſafe protection. It is an hard precept that he gives his ſervant, *Fear not.* As well might he have bid him not to ſee when he ſaw, as not to fear when he ſaw ſo dreadful a ſpectacle. The operations of the ſenſes are no leſs certain than thoſe of the affections, where the objects are no leſs proper. But the taſk is eaſy, if the next word may find belief, *For there are more with us than with them.* Multitude, and other outward probabilities, do both lead the confidence of natural hearts, and fix it. It is for none but a *David* to ſay, *I will not be afraid of ten thouſands of people, that have ſet themſelves againſt me round about.* Fleſh and blood riſeth and falleth, according to the proportion of the ſtrength, or weakneſs of apparent means.

Eliſha's man looked about him; yet his maſter prays, *Lord open his eyes that he may ſee.* Naturally we ſee not while we do ſee; every thing is ſo ſeen as it is: bodily eyes diſcern bodily objects, only ſpiritual can ſee the things of God; ſome men want both eyes and light. *Eliſha*'s ſervant had eyes, wanted illumination: no ſooner were his eyes open, than he ſaw the mountain full of horſes and chariots of fire round about *Eliſha.* They were there before; neither doth *Eliſha* pray that thoſe troops may be gathered, but that they may be ſeen: not till now

were they deſcried. Inviſible armies guard the ſervants of God, while they ſeem moſt forſaken of earthly aid, moſt expoſed to certain dangers. If the eyes of our faith be as open as thoſe of our ſenſe, to ſee angels as well as *Syrians*, we cannot be appalled with the moſt unequal terms of hoſtility. Thoſe bleſſed ſpirits are ready either to reſcue our bodies, or to carry up our ſouls to bleſſedneſs: whether ever ſhall be enjoined by their Maker, there is juſt comfort in both, in either.

Both thoſe chariots that came to fetch *Elijah*, and thoſe that came to defend *Eliſha*, were fiery. God is not leſs lovely to his own in the midſt of his judgments, than he is terrible to his enemies in the demonſtration of his mercies. Thus guarded, it is no marvel, if *Eliſha* dare walk forth into the midſt of the *Syrians*. Not one of thoſe heavenly preſidiaries ſtruck a ſtroke for the prophet, neither doth he require their blows; only he turns his prayer to his God, and ſays, *Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindneſs*. With no other than deadly intentions did thoſe *Aramites* come down to *Eliſha*, yet doth not he ſay, ſmite them with the ſword, but, *Smite them with blindneſs*; all the evil he wiſheth to them is their repentance: there was no way to ſee their error, but by blindneſs. He that prayed for the opening of his ſervant's eyes, to ſee his ſafeguard, prays for the blinding of the eyes of his enemies, that they might not ſee to do hurt.

As the eyes of *Eliſha*'s ſervant were ſo ſhut that they ſaw not the angels, when they ſaw the *Syrians*: ſo the eyes of the *Syrians* ſhall be likeways ſhut, that, when they ſee the man, they ſhall not ſee the prophet. To all other objects their eyes are clear, only to *Eliſha* they ſhall be blind; blind, not through darkneſs, but through miſ-knowledge: they ſhall ſee, and miſtake both the perſon and place. He, that made the

the ſenſes, can either hold, or delude them at pleaſure: how eaſily can he offer to the ſight other repreſentations, than thoſe which ariſe from the viſible matter, and make the heart to believe them!

Juſtly now might *Eliſha* ſay, *This is not the way, neither is this the city*, wherein *Eliſha* ſhall be deſcried. He was in *Dothan*, but not as *Eliſha*; he ſhall not be found but in *Samaria*, neither can they have any guide to him but himſelf. No ſooner are they come into the ſtreets of *Samaria*, than their eyes have leave to know both the place and the prophet. The firſt ſight they have of themſelves is in the trap of *Iſrael*, in the jaws of death. Thoſe ſtately palaces, which they now wonder at unwillingly, carry no reſemblance to them, but of their graves. Every *Iſraelite* ſeems an executioner, every houſe a jail, every beam a gibbet: and now, they look upon *Eliſha*, transformed from their guide to their common murderer, with horrour and paleneſs. It is moſt juſt with God to entangle the plotters of wickedneſs in their own ſnare.

How glad is a mortal enemy to ſnatch at all advantages of revenge! Never did the king of *Iſrael* ſee a more pleaſing ſight, than ſo many *Syrian* throats at his mercy; and, as loath to loſe ſo fair a day, as if his fingers itched to be dipt in blood, he ſays, *My father, ſhall I ſmite, ſhall I ſmite them?* The repetition argued deſire, the compellation reverence. Not without allowance of a prophet, would the king of *Iſrael* lay his hand upon an enemy, ſo miraculouſly trained home. His heart was ſtill foul with idolatry, yet would he not taint his hand with forbidden blood. Hypocriſy will be ſtill ſcrupulous in ſomething; and, in ſome awful reſtraints, is a perfect counterfeit of conſcience.

The charitable prophet ſoon gives an angry prohibition of ſlaughter; *Thou ſhalt not ſmite them: wouldſt*

wouldſt thou ſmite thoſe whom thou haſt taken captive with thy ſword, and with thy bow? as if he had ſaid, Theſe are God's captives, not thine; and if they were thine own, their blood could not be ſhed without cruelty: though in the hot chaſes of war, executions may be juſtifiable; yet in the coolneſs of deliberation, it can be no other than inhumane, to take thoſe lives which have been yielded to mercy. But here, thy bow and thy ſword are guiltleſs of the ſucceſs; only a ſtrange providence of the Almighty hath caſt them into thine hands, whom neither thy force nor thy fraud could have compaſſed. If it be victory thou aimeſt at, overcome them with kindneſs; *Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink.* O noble revenge of *Eliſha*, to feaſt his perſecutors! to provide a table for thoſe, who had provided a grave for him! Theſe *Syrians* came to *Dothan* full of bloody purpoſes to *Eliſha*; he ſends them from *Samaria* full of good cheer and jollity. Thus, thus ſhould a prophet puniſh his purſuers. No vengeance but this is heroical, and fit for Chriſtian imitation. *If thine enemy hunger, give him bread to eat; if he thirſt, give him water to drink: for thou ſhalt heap coals of fire upon his head; and the Lord ſhall reward thee. Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.*

The king of *Iſrael* hath done that by his feaſt, which he could not have done by his ſword. The bands of *Syria* will no more come by way of ambuſh or incurſion into the bounds of *Iſrael*. Never did a charitable act go away without the retribution of a bleſſing. In doing ſome good to our enemies, we do moſt good to ourſelves. God cannot but love in us this imitation of his mercy, who bids his ſun ſhine, and his rain fall where he is moſt provoked; and that love is never fruitleſs.

CONTEM. X. *The famine of* SAMARIA *relieved.*

NOT many good turns are written in marble. Soon have theſe *Syrians* forgotten the merciful beneficence of *Iſrael.* After the forbearance of ſome hoſtile inroad, all the forces of *Syria* are muſtered againſt *Jehoram.* That very *Samaria,* which had relieved the diſtreſſed *Aramites,* is by the *Aramites* beſieged, and is famiſhed by thoſe whom it had fed. The famine within the walls was more terrible than the ſword without. Their worſt enemy was ſhut within, and could not be diſlodged of their own bowels. Whither hath the idolatry of *Iſrael* brought them? Before they had been ſcourged with war, with drought, with dearth, as with a ſingle cord, they remain incorrigible, and now God twiſts two of theſe bloody laſhes together, and galls them even to death: there needs no other executioners than their own maws. Thoſe things which in their nature were not edible, at leaſt to an *Iſraelite,* were now both dear and dainty. The aſs was, beſides the untoothſomeneſs, an impure creature. That which the law of ceremonies had made unclean, the law of neceſſity had made delicate and precious. The bones of ſo carrion an head could not be picked for leſs than four hundred peices of ſilver. Neither was this ſcarcity, of victuals only, but of all other neceſſaries for human uſe; that the belly might not complain alone, the whole man was equally pinched.

The king of *Iſrael* is neither exempted from the judgment, nor yet yields under it. He walks upon the walls of his *Samaria,* to overſee the watches ſet, the engines ready, the guards changed, together with the poſture of the enemy, when a woman cries to him out of the city, *Help, my lord, O king.* Next to God, what refuge have we in all our neceſſities, but his anointed? Earthly ſovereignty can aid us in the

the caſe of the injuſtice of men, but what can it do againſt the judgments of God? *If the Lord do not help thee, whence ſhall I help thee? out of the barn-floor, or out of the wine preſs?* Even the greateſt powers muſt ſtoop to afflictons in themſelves; how ſhould they be able to prevent them in others? To ſue for aid, where is an utter impotence of redreſs, is but to upbraid the weakneſs, and aggravate the miſery of thoſe whom we implore. *Jehoram* miſtakes the ſuit; the ſupplicant calls to him for a woful piece of juſtice: two mothers have agreed to eat their ſons; the one hath yielded hers to be boiled and eaten; the other, after ſhe hath taken her part of ſo prodigious a banquet, withdraws her child, and hides him from the knife. Hunger and envy make the plaintiff importunate; and now ſhe craves the benefit of royal juſtice. She that made the firſt motion, with-holds her part of the bargain, and flies from that promiſe, whoſe truſt had made this mother childleſs. O the direful effects of famine! that turns off all reſpects of nature, and gives no place to horrour, cauſing the tender mother to lay her hands, yea her teeth, upon the fruit of her own body, and to receive that into her ſtomach, which ſhe hath brought forth of her womb. What ſhould *Jehoram* do? the match was monſtrous, the challenge was juſt, yet unnatural. This complainant had purchaſed one half of the living child, by the one half of hers dead. The mother of the ſurviving infant is preſſed by covenant, by hunger; reſtrained by nature. To force a mother to deliver up her child to voluntary ſlaughter, had been cruel; to force a debitor to pay a confeſſed arrearage, ſeemed but equal. If the remaining child be not dreſſed for food, this mother of the devoured child is both robbed and famiſhed: if he be, innocent blood is ſhed by authority. It is no marvel, if the queſtion aſtoniſhed the judge; not ſo much for the

the difficulty of the demand, as the horrour of the occaſion. To what lamentable diſtreſs did *Jehoram* find his people driven? not without cauſe did the king of *Iſrael* rend his garments, and ſhew his ſackcloth; well might he ſee his people branded with that ancient curſe, which God had denounced againſt the rebellious: *The Lord ſhall bring a nation againſt thee of a fierce countenance, which ſhall not regard the perſon of the old, nor ſhew favour to the young; and he ſhall beſiege thee in all thy gates; and thou ſhalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the fleſh of thy ſons, and of thy daughters. The tender and delicate woman, her eyes ſhall be evil towards her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward the children which ſhe ſhall bear, for ſhe ſhall eat them for want of all things, ſecretly in the ſiege and ſtraitneſs.* He mourns for the plague, he mourns not for the cauſe of this plague, his ſin, and theirs: I find his ſorrow, I find not his repentance. The worſt man may grieve for his ſmart, only the good heart grieves for his offence. Inſtead of being penitent, *Jehoram* is furious, and turns his rage from his ſins, againſt the prophet: *God do ſo to me, and more alſo, if the head of* Eliſha, *the ſon of* Shaphat, *ſhall ſtand on him this day.* Alas, what hath the righteous done! Perhaps *Eliſha*, that we may imagine ſome colours of this diſpleaſure, forethreatened this judgment, but they deſerved it; perhaps he might have averted it by his prayers, their unrepentance diſabled him; perhaps he perſuaded *Jehoram* to hold out the ſiege, though through much hardneſs he foreſaw the deliverance. In all this, how hath *Eliſha* forfeited his head? All *Iſrael* did not afford an head ſo guiltleſs, as this that was deſtined to ſlaughter. This is the faſhion of the world; the lewd blames the innocent, and will revenge their own ſins upon others uprightneſs.

In

In the midſt of all this ſad eſtate of *Samaria*, and theſe ſtorms of *Jehoram*, the prophet ſits quietly in his own houſe, amongſt his holy conſorts, bewailing, no doubt, both the ſins and miſery of their people, and prophetically conferring of the iſſue; when ſuddenly God reveals to him the bloody intent and meſſage of *Jehoram*, and he at once reveals it to his fellows: *See ye how this ſon of a murderer hath ſent to take away mine head?* O the inimitable liberty of a prophet! The ſame God, that ſhewed him his danger, ſuggeſted his words; he may be bold, where we muſt be awful. Still is *Naboth*'s blood laid in *Jehoram*'s diſh; the foul fact of *Ahab* blemiſheth his poſterity; and now when the ſon threats violence to the innocent, murder is objected to him as hereditary.

He, that foreſaw his own peril, provides for his ſafety; *Shut the door, and hold him faſt at the door.* No man is bound to tender his throat to an unjuſt ſtroke; this bloody commiſſion was prevented by a prophetical foreſight. The ſame eye that ſaw the executioner coming to ſmite him, ſaw alſo the king haſtening after him to ſtay the blow; the prophet had been no other than guilty of his own blood, if he had not reſerved himſelf a while, for the reſcue of authority. O the inconſtancy of carnal hearts! It was not long ſince *Jehoram* could ſay to *Eliſha*, *My father, ſhall I ſmite them?* now he is ready to ſmite him as an enemy, whom he honoured as a father; yet again his lips had no ſooner given ſentence of death againſt the prophet, than his feet ſtir to recal it.

It ſhould ſeem that *Eliſha*, upon the challenges and expoſtulations of *Jehoram*'s meſſenger, had ſent a perſuaſive meſſage to the king of *Iſrael*, yet a while to wait patiently upon God for his deliverance; the diſcontented prince flies off in an impotent anger, *Behold this evil is of the Lord, what ſhould I wait for the*

the Lord any longer? O the deſperate reſolutions of impatient minds! They have ſtinted God both for his time and his meaſure; if he exceed either, they either turn their backs upon him, or fly in his face. The poſition was true, the inference deadly. All that evil was of the Lord; they deſerved it, he ſent it. What then? It ſhould have been therefore argued, He, that ſent it, can remove it; I will wait upon his mercy, under whoſe juſtice I ſuffer. Impatience and diſtruſt ſhall but aggravate my judgment; *It is the Lord, let him do what he will.* But now, to deſpair becauſe God is juſt, to defy mercy becauſe it lingers, to reject God for correction, it is a preſumptuous madneſs, an impious pettiſhneſs.

Yet, in ſpite of all theſe provocations, both of king and people, *Eliſha* hath good news for *Jehoram; Thus ſaith the Lord, To-morrow, about this time, ſhall a meaſure of fine flower be ſold for a ſhekel, and two meaſures of barley for a ſhekel, in the gate of* Samaria. Miſerable *Iſrael* now ſees an end of this hard trial; one day's patience ſhall free them both of the ſiege and famine. God's deliverances may over-ſtay our expectation, not the due period of his own counſels. O infinite mercy! when man ſays, No longer, God ſays, *To-morrow;* as if he would condeſcend where he might judge, and would pleaſe them who deſerved nothing but puniſhment. The word ſeemed not more comfortable than incredible: *A lord, on whoſe hand the king leaned, anſwered the man of God, and ſaid, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?* Prophecies, before they be fulfilled, are riddles; no ſpirit can aread them, but that by which they are delivered. It is a fooliſh and injurious infidelity, to queſtion a poſſibility, where we know the meſſage is God's: how eaſy is it for that omnipotent hand to effect thoſe things, which ſurpaſſes all the reach of human conceit! Had God intended

a miraculous multiplication, was it not as eaſy for him to increaſe the corn or meal of *Samaria*, as the widow's oil? was it not as eaſy for him to give plenty of victuals, without opening the windows of heaven, as to give plenty of water, without wind or rain? The Almighty hates to be diſtruſted. This peer of *Iſrael* ſhall rue his unbelief; *Behold, thou ſhalt ſee it with thine eyes, but ſhalt not eat thereof:* The ſight ſhall be yielded for conviction, the fruition ſhall be denied for puniſhment. Well is that man worthy to want the benefit which he would not believe: who can pity to ſee infidelity excluded from the bleſſings of earth, from the glory of heaven?

How ſtrange a choice doth God make of the intelligencers of ſo happy a change! Four lepers ſit at the entering of the gate, they ſee nothing but death before them, famine within the walls, the enemy without. The election is woful; at laſt they reſolve upon the leſſer evil, famine is worſe than the *Syrian:* in the famine there is certainty of periſhing, amongſt the *Syrians* hazard; perhaps the enemy may have ſome pity, hunger hath none; and, were the death equally certain, it were more eaſy to die by the ſword, than by famine. Upon this deliberation they come down into the *Syrian* camp, to find either ſpeed of mercy or diſpatch. Their hunger would not give them reſpite till morning; by twilight are they fallen upon the uttermoſt tents; *Behold, there was no man:* they marvel at the ſilence and ſolitude, they look and liſten, the noiſe of their own feet affrighted them; their guilty hearts ſupplied the *Syrians*, and expected, fearfully, thoſe which were as fearfully fled. How eaſily can the Almighty confound the power of the ſtrong, the policy of the wiſe! God puts a panic terror into the hearts of the proud *Syrians;* he makes them hear a noiſe of chariots, and a noiſe of horſes, even the noiſe of a great hoſt; they ſay one

to

to another, *Lo, the king of* Iſrael *hath hired againſt us the kings of the* Hittites, *and the kings of the* Egyptians, *to come upon us!* They ariſe therefore in a confuſed rout, and leaving all their ſubſtance behind them, fly for their lives. Not long before, *Eliſha*'s ſervant ſaw chariots and horſes, but heard none: now, theſe *Syrians* hear chariots and horſes, but ſee none: that ſight comforted his heart, this ſound diſmayed theirs. The *Iſraelites* heard no noiſe within the walls; the lepers heard no noiſe without the gates; only the *Syrians* heard this noiſe in their camp. What a ſcorn doth God put upon theſe preſumptuous *Aramites!* he will not vouchſafe to uſe any ſubſtantial ſtratagem againſt them; nothing but an empty ſound ſhall ſcatter them, and ſend them home empty of ſubſtance, laden with ſhame, half dead with fear; the very horſes, that might have haſtened their flight, are left tied in their tents; their very garments are a burden; all is left behind, ſave their very bodies, and thoſe breathleſs for ſpeed.

Doubtleſs theſe *Syrians* knew well, to what miſerable exigents the incloſed *Iſraelites* were brought, by their ſiege; and now made full account to ſack and ranſack their *Samaria;* already had they divided, and ſwallowed the prey; when ſuddenly God puts them into a ridiculous confuſion, and ſends them to ſeek ſafety in their heels: no booty is now in price with them, but their life, and happy is he that can run faſteſt.

Thus the Almighty laughs at the deſigns of inſolent men, and ſhuts up their counſels in ſhame.

The fear of the four lepers began now to give way to ſecurity; they fill their bellies, and hide their treaſures, and paſs from one tent to another, in a faſtidious choice of the beſt commodities: they, who ere while would have held it happineſs enough to have

been bleſſed with a cruſt, now wantonly rove for dainties, and from neceſſity leap into exceſs.

How far ſelf-love carries us in all our actions, even to the neglect of the public! Not till their own bellies, and hands and eyes were filled, did theſe lepers think of imparting this news to *Iſrael*. At laſt, when themſelves are glutted, they begin to remember the hunger of their brethren, and now they find room for remorſe; *We do not well; this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace.* Nature teaches us, that it is an injury to engroſs bleſſings, and ſo to mind the private, as if we had no relation to a community. We are worthy to be ſhut out of the city-gates for lepers, if the reſpects to the public good do not overſway with us in all our deſires, in all our demeanour; and well may we, with theſe covetous lepers, fear a miſchief upon ourſelves, if we ſhall wilfully conceal bleſſings from others.

The conſcience of this wrong and danger ſends back the lepers into the city; they call to the porters, and ſoon tranſmit the news to the king's houſhold. The king of *Iſrael* complains not to have his ſleep broken with ſuch intelligence; he ariſeth in the night, and, not contemning good news, though brought by lepers, conſults with his ſervants of the buſineſs.

We cannot be too jealous of the intentions of an enemy. *Jehoram* wiſely ſuſpects this flight of the *Syrians* to be but ſimulatory and politic, only to draw *Iſrael* out of their city for the ſpoil of both. There may be more peril in the back of any enemy than in his face: the cruelleſt ſlaughters have been in retiring. Eaſily therefore is the king perſuaded to adventure ſome few forlorn ſcouts for further aſſurance. The word of *Eliſha* is out of his head, out of his heart, elſe there had been no place for this doubt. Timorous hearts never think themſelves ſure; thoſe, that have no faith, had need of much ſenſe.

Thoſe

Thoſe few horſes that remain are ſent forth for diſcovery; they find nothing but monuments of frightfulneſs, pledges of ſecurity. Now *Iſrael* dares iſſue forth to the prey; there, as if the *Syrians* had come thither to enrich them, they find granaries, wardrobes, treaſures, and whatever may ſerve either for uſe or oſtentation. Every *Iſraelite* goes away filled, laden, wearied with the wealthy ſpoil.

As ſcarcity breeds dearth, ſo plenty cheapneſs. To-day a meaſure of fine flower is lower rated, than yeſterday of dung.

The diſtruſtful peer of *Iſrael* ſees this abundance, according to the word of the prophet, but enjoys it not. He ſees this plenty can come in at the gate, though the windows of heaven be not open. The gate is his charge; the famiſhed *Iſraelites* preſſed in upon him, and bear him down in the throng. Extreme hunger hath no reſpect to greatneſs. Not their rudeneſs, but his own unbelief hath trampled him under feet. He that abaſed the power of God by his diſtruſt, is abaſed worthily to the heels of the multitude. Faith exalts a man above his own ſphere; infidelity depreſſes him into the duſt, into hell. *He that believes not is condemned already.*

BOOK TWENTIETH.

CONTEM. I. *The* SHUNAMITE *ſuing to* JEHORAM; ELISHA *conferring with* HAZAEL.

HOW royally hath *Eliſha* paid the *Shunamite* for her lodging! to him already ſhe owes the life of her ſon, both given and reſtored; and now again, after ſo many years, as might well have worn out the memory of ſo ſmall a courteſy, herſelf, her

her ſon, her family, owe their lives to ſo thankful a gueſt. That table and bed, and ſtool and candleſtick, was well beſtowed. That candleſtick repaid her the light of her future life and condition, that table the means of maintenance, that ſtool a ſeat of ſafe abode, that bed a quiet reſt from the common calamities of her nation. He is a niggard to himſelf that ſcants his beneficence to a prophet, whoſe very cold water ſhall not go unrewarded. *Elijah* preſerved the *Sareptan* from famine, *Eliſha* the *Shunamite;* he, by proviſion of oil and meal; this, by premonition: *Ariſe, and go, thou and thine houſhold, and ſojourn whereſoever thou canſt ſojourn.* The *Sareptan* was poor, and driven to extremes, therefore the prophet provides for her from hand to mouth. The *Shunamite* was wealthy, and therefore the prophet ſends her to provide for herſelf. The ſame goodneſs, that relieves our neceſſity, leaves our competency to the hand of our own counſel; in the one he will make uſe of his own power, in the other of our providence.

The very prophet adviſes this holy client to leave the bounds of the church, and to ſeek life, where ſhe ſhould not find religion. Extremity is for the time a juſt diſpenſation with ſome common rules of our outward demeanour and motions, even from better to worſe. All *Iſrael* and *Judah* ſhall be famiſhed: the body can be preſerved nowhere, but where the ſoul ſhall want. Sometimes the conveniencies of the ſoul muſt yield to bodily neceſſities. Wantonneſs and curioſity can find no advantage from that which is done out of the power of need.

It is a long famine that ſhall afflict *Iſrael.* He, upon whom the ſpirit of *Elijah* was doubled, doubled the judgment inflicted by his Maſter. Three years and an half did *Iſrael* gaſp under the drought of *Elijah:* ſeven years dearth ſhall it ſuffer under *Eliſha.*

The

The trials of God are many times not more grievous for their ſharpneſs, than for their continuance.

This ſcarcity ſhall not come alone; God ſhall call for it: whatever be the ſecond cauſe, he is the firſt. The executioners of the Almighty, ſuch are his judgments, ſtand ready waiting upon his juſt throne; and do no ſooner receive the watch-word, than they fly upon the world, and plague it for ſin. Only the cry of our ſins moves God to call for vengeance; and, if God once call, it muſt come. How oft, how earneſtly are we called to repentance, and ſtir not! The meſſengers of God's wrath fly forth at the leaſt beck, and fulfil the will of his revenge upon thoſe, whoſe obedience would not fulfil the will of his command.

After ſo many proofs of fidelity, the *Shunamite* cannot diſtruſt the prophet; not ſtaying therefore to be convicted by the event, ſhe removes her family into the land of the *Philiſtines*. No nation was more oppoſite to *Iſrael*, none more worthily odious; yet there doth the *Shunamite* ſeek and find ſhelter: even the ſhade of thoſe trees that are unwholeſome may keep us from a ſtorm. Every where will God find room for his own. The fields of *Philiſtines* flouriſh, while the ſoil of *Iſrael* yields nothing but weeds and barrenneſs. Not that *Iſrael* was more ſinful, but that the ſin of *Iſrael* is more intolerable. The offers of grace are ſo many aggravations of wickedneſs. In equal offences, thoſe do juſtly ſmart more, who are more obliged. No peſtilence is ſo contagious, as that which hath taken the pureſt air.

Theſe *Philiſtine* neighbours would never have endured themſelves to be peſtered with foreigners, eſpecially *Iſraelites*, whom they hated, beſides religion, for their uſurpation: neither were they, in all likelihood, preſſed with multitude. The reſt of *Iſrael* were led on with hopes, preſuming upon the amends of the next harveſt, till their want grew deſperate and irremediable;

irremediable; only the forewarned *Shunamite* prevents the miſchief; now ſhe finds, what it is to have a prophet her friend. Happy are thoſe ſouls, that upon all occaſions conſult with God's ſeers! they ſhall be freed from the plagues wherein the ſecure blindneſs of others is heedleſly overtaken.

Seven years had this *Shunamite* ſojourned in *Paleſtine*, now ſhe returns to her own, and is excluded. She, that found harbour among *Philiſtines*, finds oppreſſion and violence among *Iſraelites*; thoſe of her kindred, taking advantage of her abſence, had ſhared her poſſeſſions. How oft doth it fall out, that the worſt enemies of a man are thoſe of his own houſe! All went by contraries with this *Shunamite*; in the famine ſhe had enough, in the common plenty ſhe was ſcanted; *Philiſtines* were kind unto her, *Iſraelites* cruel. Both our fears and our hopes do not ſeldom diſappoint us. It is ſafe truſting to that ſtay which can never fail us, who can eaſily provide us both of friendſhip in *Paleſtine*, and of juſtice in *Iſrael*. We may not judge of the religion by particular actions: a very *Philiſtine* may be merciful, when an *Iſraelite* is unjuſt. The perſon may be faulty, when the profeſſion is holy.

It was not long ſince the prophet made that friendly offer to the *Shunamite*, out of the deſire of a thankful requital: *What is to be done for thee? wouldſt thou be ſpoken for to the king, or to the captain of the hoſt?* and ſhe anſwered, *I dwell among my brethren*. Little did ſhe then think of this injurious meaſure; elſe ſhe might have ſaid, I dwell among my enemies, I dwell among robbers. It is like they were then friendly, who were now cruel and oppreſſive: there is no truſt to be repoſed in fleſh and blood. How ſhould their favours be conſtant, who are, in their nature and diſpoſition, variable? It is the ſureſt way to rely on him, who

who is ever like himſelf, the meaſure of whoſe love is eternity.

Whither ſhould the *Shunamite* go to complain of her wrong, but to the court? there is no other refuge of the oppreſſed, but public authority. All juſtice is derived from ſovereignty: kings are not called gods for nothing; they do both ſentence and execute for the Almighty.

Doubtleſs now the poor *Shunamite* thought of the courteous proffer of *Eliſha*, and, miſſing a friend at the court, is glad to be the preſenter of her own petition.

How happily doth God contrive all events for the good of his! This ſupplicant ſhall fall upon that inſtant for her ſuit, when the king ſhall be talking with *Gehazi*, when *Gehazi* ſhall be talking of her to the king; the words of *Gehazi*, the thoughts of the king, the deſires of the *Shunamite* ſhall be all drawn together, by the wiſe providence of God, into the centre of one moment, that his oppreſſed ſervant might receive a ſpeedy juſtice. O the infinite wiſdom, power, mercy of our God, that inſenſibly orders all our ways, as to his own holy purpoſes, ſo to our beſt advantage!

What doth *Jehoram* the king talking with *Gehazi* the leper? that very preſence was an eye-ſore.

But if the cohabitation with the infectious were forbidden, yet not the conference; certainly I begin to think of ſome goodneſs in both theſe. Had there not been ſome goodneſs in *Jehoram*, he had not taken pleaſure to hear, even from a leprous mouth, the miraculous acts and praiſes of God's prophet. Had there not been ſome goodneſs in *Gehazi*, he had not, after ſo fearful an infliction of judgment, thus ingenuouſly recounted the praiſes of his ſevere maſter. He, that told that dear-bought lie to the prophet, tells now all truths of the prophet to

the king. Perhaps his leproſy had made him clean; if ſo, happy was it for him, that his forehead was white with the diſeaſe, if his ſoul became hereupon white with repentance: but we may well know that the deſire, or report of hiſtorical truths, doth not always argue grace. Still *Jehoram*, after the inquiry of the prophet's miracles, continues his idolatry. He, that was curious to hearken after the wonders of *Eliſha*, is not careful to follow his doctrine: therefore are *Gehazi* and the *Shunamite* met before him, that he may be convicted, who will not be reformed. Why was it elſe, that the preſence of the perſons ſhould thus unexpectedly make good the relation, if God had not meant the inexcuſableneſs of *Jehoram*, while he muſt needs ſay within himſelf, Thus potent is the prophet of that God, whom I obey not. Were not *Eliſha*'s the true God, how could he work ſuch wonders? and, if he be the true God, why is he not mine? But what? ſhall I change *Ahab*'s God for *Jehoſaphat*'s? No, I cannot deny the miracles, I will not admit of the author: let *Eliſha* be powerful, I will be conſtant. O wretched *Jehoram*, how much better had it been for thee never to have ſeen the face of *Gehazi*, and the ſon of the *Shunamite*, than to go away unmoved with the vengeance of leproſy in the one, with the merciful reſuſcitation of the other! Therefore is thy judgment fearfully aggravated, becauſe thou wouldſt not yield to what thou couldſt not oppoſe. Had not *Ahab*'s obduratenes been propagated to his ſon, ſo powerful demonſtrations of divine power could not have been uneffectual. Wicked hearts are ſo much worſe, by how much God is better: this anvil is the harder by being continually beaten upon, whether with judgments or mercy.

Yet this good uſe will God have made of this report, and this preſence, that the poor *Shunamite* ſhall

ſhall have juſtice. That ſon, whoſe life was reſtored ſhall have his inheritance revived: his eſtate ſhall fare the better for *Eliſha*'s miracles. How much more will our merciful God ſecond his own bleſſings, when the favours of unjuſt men are therefore drawn to us, becauſe we have been the ſubject of divine beneficence!

It was a large and full award, that this occurrence drew from the king; *Reſtore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field, ſince the day that ſhe left the land, even until now.* Not the preſent poſſeſſion only is given her, but the arrearages.

Nothing hinders, but that outward juſtice may ſtand with groſs idolatry. The widow may thank *Eliſha* for this: his miracle wrought ſtill, and puts this new life in her dead eſtate; his abſence did that for the preſervation of life, which his preſence did for the reſtoring it from death. She that was ſo ready to expoſtulate with the man of God, upon the loſs of her ſon, might, perhaps, have been as ready to impute the loſs of her eſtate to his advice. Now, that for his ſake ſhe is enriched with her own, how doth ſhe bleſs God for ſo happy a gueſt? When we have forgotten our own good turns, God remembers and crowns them. Let us do good to all while we have time, but eſpecially to the houſhold of faith.

Could *Iſrael* have been ſenſible of their own condition, it was no ſmall unhappineſs to loſe the preſence of *Eliſha*. Whether for the idolatries, or for the famine of *Iſrael*, the prophet is gone into *Syria*, no doubt *Naaman* welcomed him thither, and now would force upon him thanks for his cure, which the man of God would not receive at home.

How famous is he now grown that was taken from the team! His name is not confined to his own nation; foreign countries take notice of it, and kings are glad

to liſten after him, and woo him with preſents. *Benhadad*, the king of *Syria*, whoſe counſels he had detected, rejoiceth to hear of his preſence; and now, as having forgotten that he had ſent a whole hoſt to beſiege the prophet in *Dothan*, ſends an honourable meſſenger to him, laden with the burden of forty camels, to conſult with this oracle concerning his ſickneſs and recovery.

This *Syrian*, belike in his diſtreſs, dares not truſt to his own gods; but, having had good proof of the power of the God of *Iſrael*, both in *Naaman*'s cure, and in the miraculous defeats of his greateſt forces, is glad to ſend to that ſervant of God whom he had perſecuted. Wicked men are not the ſame in health, and in ſickneſs; their affliction is worthy of the thanks, if they be well-minded, not themſelves.

Doubtleſs the errand of *Benhadad* was not only to inquire of the iſſue of his diſeaſe, but to require the prayers of the prophet for a good iſſue. Even the worſt man doth ſo love himſelf, that he can be content to make a beneficial uſe of thoſe inſtruments whoſe goodneſs he hateth.

Hazael, the chief peer of *Syria*, is deſigned to this meſſage; the wealth of his preſent ſtrives with the humility of his carriage and ſpeech: *Thy ſon* Benhadad, *king of* Syria, *hath ſent me to thee, ſaying, Shall I recover of this diſeaſe?* Not long ſince, *Jehoram* king of *Iſrael* had ſaid to *Eliſha*, *My father, ſhall I ſmite them?* and now *Benhadad* king of *Syria* ſays, *My father, ſhall I recover?* Lo, how this poor *Meholathite* hath kings to his ſons! How great is the honour of God's prophets with Pagans, with princes! Who can be but confounded to ſee evangelical prophets deſpiſed by the meaneſt chriſtians.

It is more than a ſingle anſwer that the prophet returns to this meſſage; one anſwer he gives to *Benhadad*

hadad that ſent it, another he gives to *Hazael* that brings it: that to *Benhadad* is, *Thou mayſt ſurely recover;* that to *Hazael*, *The Lord hath ſhewed me that he ſhall ſurely die.* What ſhall we ſay then? Is there a lie, or an equivocation in the holy mouth of the prophet? God forbid. It is one thing what ſhall be the nature and iſſue of the diſeaſe; another thing what may outwardly befal the perſon of *Benhadad:* the queſtion is moved of the former, whereto the anſwer is direct, The diſeaſe is not mortal; but, withal, an intimation is given to the bearer of an event beyond the reach of his demand, which he may know, but either needs not, or may not return: *The Lord hath ſhewed me that he ſhall ſurely die*, by another means, though not by the diſeaſe.

The ſeer of God deſcries more in *Hazael*, than he could ſee in himſelf; he fixes his eyes therefore ſtedfaſtly in the *Syrian*'s face, as one that in thoſe lines read the bloody ſtory of his life.

Hazael bluſhes, *Eliſha* weeps: the intention of thoſe eyes did not ſo much amaze *Hazael*, as the tears; as yet he was not guilty to himſelf of any wrong that might ſtrain out this juice of ſorrow: *Why weepeth my Lord?*

The prophet fears not to foretel *Hazael* all the villanies which he ſhould once do to *Iſrael;* how he ſhould fire their forts, and kill their young men, and rip the mothers, and daſh their children. I marvel not now at the tears of thoſe eyes, which foreſaw this miſerable vaſtation of the inheritance of God; the very mention whereof is abhorred of the future author: *What, is thy ſervant a dog, that I ſhould do this great thing?* they are ſavage cruelties whereof thou ſpeakeſt; it were more fit for me to weep, that thou ſhouldſt repute me ſo brutiſh: I ſhould no leſs condemn myſelf for a beaſt, if I could ſuſpect my own

own degeneration ſo far. Wicked men are carried into thoſe heights of impiety, which they could not, in their good mood, have poſſibly believed; nature is ſubject to favourable opinions of itſelf, and will rather miſtruſt a prophet of God than her own good diſpoſition. How many, from honeſt beginnings, have riſen to incredible licentiouſneſs; whoſe lives are now ſuch, that it were as hard for a man to believe they had ever been good, as to have perſuaded them once, they ſhould prove ſo deſperately ill!

To give ſome overture unto *Hazael* of the opportunity of this enſuing miſchief, the prophet foretels him, from God, that he ſhall be the king of *Syria*.

He that ſhews the event, doth not appoint the means. Far was it from the ſpirit of God's prophet to ſet, or encourage a treaſon; while he ſaid therefore, *Thou ſhalt be king of* Syria, he ſaid not, Go home, and kill thy maſter. The wicked ambition of *Hazael* draws this damnable concluſion out of holy premiſes; and now, having fed the hopes of his ſovereign with the expectation of recovery, the next day he ſmothers his maſter. The impotent deſire of rule bruiks no delay. Had not *Hazael* been graceleſly cruel, after he had received this prediction of the ſeer, he ſhould have patiently waited for the crown of *Syria*, till lawful means had ſet it upon his head; now he will, by a cloſe execution, make way to the throne: a wet cloth hath ſtopt the mouth of his ſick ſovereign, no noiſe is heard, the carcaſe is fair; who can complain of any thing but the diſeaſe?

O *Hazael*, thou ſhalt not thus eaſily ſtop the mouth of thine own conſcience; that ſhall call thee traitor, even in thy chair of ſtate, and ſhall check all thy royal triumphs with, *Thou haſt founded thy throne in blood!* I am deceived, if this wet cloth ſhall not wipe thy lips in thy jollieſt feaſts, and make thy beſt morſels unſavoury. Sovereignty is painful upon the faireſt

faireſt terms; but, upon treachery and murder, tormenting. Woful is the caſe of that man, whoſe public cares are aggravated with private guiltineſs; and happy is he that can enjoy a little with the peace of an honeſt heart.

CONTEM. II. JEHU *with* JEHORAM *and* JEZEBEL.

YET *Hazael* began his cruelty with loſs. *Ramoth-gilead* is won from him; *Jehoram* the ſon hath recovered that, which *Ahab* his father attempted in vain. That city was dear bought of *Iſrael*, it coſt the life of *Ahab*, the blood of *Jehoram;* thoſe wounds were healed with victory; the king tends his health at *Jezreel*, while the captains were enjoying, and ſeconding their ſucceſs at *Ramoth*.

Old *Eliſha* hath neither cottage nor foot of land, yet, ſitting in an obſcure corner, he gives order for kingdoms; not by way of authority, (this uſurpation had been no leſs proud than unjuſt) but by way of meſſage from the God of kings; even a mean herald may go on a great errand. The prophets of the goſpel have nothing to do but with ſpiritual kingdoms; to beat down the kingdoms of ſin and Satan, to tranſlate ſouls to the kingdom of heaven.

He, that renewed the life of the *Shunamite*'s ſon, muſt ſtoop to age; that block lies in his way to *Jehu;* the aged prophet employs a ſpeedier meſſenger, who muſt alſo gird up his loins for haſte. No common pace will ſerve us, when we go on God's meſſage; the very loſs of minutes may be unrecoverable. This great ſeer of God well ſaw a preſent concurrence of all opportunities. The captains of the hoſt were then readily combined for this exploit; the army was on foot, *Jehoram* abſent: a ſmall delay might have troubled the work; the diſperſion of the captains and hoſt,

hoſt, or the preſence of the king, might either have defeated or ſlacked the diſpatch. He is prodigal of his ſucceſs, that is ſlow in his execution.

The directions of *Eliſha* to the young prophet are full and punctual, whither to go, what to carry, what to do, where to do it, what to ſay, what ſpeed to make, in his act, in his return. In the buſineſſes of God, it matters not how little is left to our diſcretion; there is no important buſineſs of the Almighty, wherein his precepts are not ſtrict and expreſs; look how much more ſpeciality there is in the charge of God, ſo much more danger is in the violation.

The young prophet is curiouſly obedient, in his haſte, in his obſervation and carriage; and finding *Jehu*, according to *Eliſha*'s prediction, ſet amongſt the captains of the hoſt, he ſingles him forth by a reverent compellation. *I have an errand to thee, O captain.* Might not the prophet have ſtayed till the table had riſen, and then have followed *Jehu* to his lodging? Surely the wiſdom of God hath purpoſely pitched upon this ſeaſon, that the public view of a ſacred meſſenger, and the haſty evocation of ſo noted a perſon to ſuch a ſecrecy, might prepare the hearts of thoſe commanders of *Iſrael* to the expectation of ſome great deſign.

The inmoſt room is but cloſe enough for this act; ere many hours, all *Iſrael* ſhall know that, which yet may not be truſted with one eye: the goodneſs of God makes wiſe proviſion for the ſafety of his meſſengers, and, while he employs their ſervice, prevents their dangers.

But how is it that, of all the kings of the ten tribes, none was ever anointed but *Jehu?* Is it for that the God, who would not countenance the erection of that uſurped throne, would countenance the alteration? or is it, that by this viſible teſtimony of divine ordi-

nation,

nation, the courage of the *Iſraelitiſh* captains might be raiſed up to ſecond the high and bold attempt of him whom they ſaw deſtined from heaven to rule?

Together with the oil of this unction, here was a charge of revenge; a revenge of the blood of the prophets upon *Jezebel*, of wickedneſs and idolatry upon *Ahab*: neither was the extirpation of this lewd family forepropheſied only to *Jehu*, but enjoined.

Elijah foretold, and the world expected, ſome fearful account of the abominable cruelty and impiety of that accurſed houſe; now it is called for, when it ſeemed forgotten. *Ahab* ſhall have no poſterity, *Jezebel* ſhall have no tomb but the dogs. This woful doom is committed to *Jehu*'s execution.

O the ſure, though patient, juſtice of the Almighty! Not only *Ahab* and *Jezebel* had been bloody and idolatrous, but *Iſrael* was drawn into the partnerſhip of their crimes: all theſe ſhall ſhare in the judgment. *Elijah*'s complaint in the cave now receives this late anſwer; *Hazael* ſhall plague *Iſrael*, *Jehu* ſhall plague the houſe of *Ahab* and *Jezebel*: *Eliſha*'s ſervant thus ſeconds *Eliſha*'s maſter. When wickedneſs is ripe in the field, God will not let it ſhed to grow again, but cuts it up, by a juſt and ſeaſonable vengeance. *Ahab*'s drooping under the threat, hath put off the judgment from his own days; now it comes, and ſweeps away his wife, his iſſue, and falls heavy upon his ſubjects. Pleaſe yourſelves, O ye vain ſinners, in the ſlow pace of vengeance; it will be neither leſs certain, nor more eaſy, for the delay; rather it were to pay for that leiſure in the extremity.

The prophet hath done his errand, and is gone. *Jehu* returns to his fellows, with his head not more wet with oil, than buſied with thoughts: no doubt, his face bewrayed ſome inward tumults and diſtractions of imagination, neither ſeemed he to return the ſame he went out. They aſk therefore, *Is all well?*

Wherefore came this mad fellow to thee? The prophets of God were to these idolatrous *Israelites* like comets, who were never seen without the portendment of a mischief. When the priests of their *Baal* were quietly sacrificing, all was well; but now, when a prophet of God comes in sight, their guiltiness asks, *Is all well?* All would be well but for their sins; they fear not these, they fear their reprover.

Israel was come to a good pass, when the prophets of God went with them for madmen. O ye *Baalitish* ruffians, whither hath your impiety and profaneness carried you, that ye should thus blaspheme the servants of the living God? Ye, that run on madding after vain idols, tax the sober guides of true worship for madness. Thus it becomes the godless enemies of truth, the heralds of our patience, to miscal our innocence, to revile our most holy profession. What wonder is it that God's messengers are madmen unto those to whom the wisdom of God is foolishness?

The message was not delivered to *Jehu* for a concealment, but for publication. Silence could not effect the word that was told him, common notice must. *Ye know the man, and his communication.* The habit shows you the man, the calling shows you his errand. Even prophets were distinguished by their clothes; their mantle was not the common wear: why should not this sacred vocation be known by a peculiar attire? These captains had not called him a madman, if they had not known him a prophet: by the man therefore they might guess at his message. Prophets do not use to appear, but upon serious errands, whether of reproof, or of prediction.

Nice civilities or denials were not then known to the world: they said, *It is false, tell us now.* Amongst these captains no combat, no unkindness follows upon a word so rudely familiar.

Jehu

Jehu needs not tell them that the man was a prophet; he tells them the prophecy of the man, what he had ſaid, what he had done.

Their eyes had no ſooner ſeen the oil, their ears had no ſooner heard, *Thus ſaith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over* Iſrael, than they riſe from their ſeats, as rapt with a tempeſt, and are hurled into arms: ſo do they haſte to proclaim *Jehu*, that they ſcarce ſtay to ſnatch up their garments, which they had perhaps left behind them for ſpeed, had they not meant, with theſe rich abulziements, to garniſh a ſtate for their new ſovereign, to whom, having now erected an extemporal throne, they do, by the ſound of trumpets, give the ſtyle of royalty, Jehu *is king*.

So much credit hath that mad fellow with theſe gallants of *Iſrael*, that upon his word they will preſently adventure their lives, and change the crown. God gives a ſecret authority to his deſpiſed ſervants, ſo as they which hate their perſon, yet reverence their truth: even very ſcorners cannot but believe them. If, when the prophets of the goſpel tell us of a ſpiritual kingdom, they be diſtruſted of thoſe which profeſs to obſerve them, how ſhameful is the diſproportion! how juſt ſhall their judgment be!

Yet I cannot ſay, whether mere obedience to the prophet, or perſonal diſlikes of *Jehoram*, or partial reſpects to *Jehu*, drew the captains of *Iſrael*. The will of God may be done thankleſly, when fulfilling the ſubſtance, we fail of the intention, and err in circumſtance.

Only *Ramoth* is conſcious of this ſudden inauguration: this new princedom yet reaches no further than the ſound of the trumpet. *Jehu* is no leſs ſubtile than valiant; he knew, that the notice of this unexpected change might work a buſy and dangerous reſiſtance; he therefore gives order, that no meſſenger of the news may prevent his perſonal execution, that ſo he

might ſurpriſe *Jehoram* in his palace of *Jezreel*, whether tending his late wounds, or ſecurely feaſting his friends, and dreaming of nothing leſs than danger; and might be ſeen and felt at once. Secrecy is the ſafeſt guard of any deſign; diſcloſed projects are either fruſtrated, or made needleſly difficult.

Neither is *Jehu* more cloſe than ſwift; that very trumpet, with the ſame wind, ſounds his march; from the top of the ſtairs, he ſteps down into his chariot. That man means to ſpeed, who can be at once reſerved in his own counſels, and reſolute and quick in his performances.

Who could but pity the unhappy and unſeaſonable viſitation of the grandchild of *Jehoſaphat*, were it not that he was degenerate into the family of *Ahab? Ahaziah* king of *Judah* is come to viſit *Jehoram* king of *Iſrael;* the knowledge of his late received wounds hath drawn thither this kind ill-matched ally. He, who was partner of the war, cannot but be a viſiter of the wounds.

The two kings are in the height of their compliment and entertainments, when the watchman of the tower of *Jezreel* eſpies a troop afar off. For ought was known, there was nothing but peace in all the land of *Iſrael;* and *Judah* was now ſo combined with it, that both their kings were feaſting under one roof; yet, in the midſt of their ſuppoſed ſafety, the watch-tower is not unfurniſhed with heedy eyes. No ſecurity of peace can free wiſe governors from a careful ſuſpicion of what may come, and a providence againſt the worſt. Even while we know of no enemies, the watch-tower of due intelligence may not be empty.

In vain are dangers foreſeen, if they be not premoniſhed; it is all one to have a blind and a mute watchman; this ſpeaks what he ſees, *I ſee a company.*

Doubtleſs

Doubtleſs *Jehoram*'s head was now full of thoughts, neither knew he what conſtruction to put upon this approaching troop. Perhaps the *Syrians*, he thinks, may have recovered *Ramoth*, and chaſed the garriſon of *Iſrael;* neither can he imagine, whether theſe ſhould be hoſtile victors, or vanquiſhed ſubjects, or conſpiring rebels. Every way this rout was dreadful. O *Jehoram*, thou beginneſt thy fears too late! hadſt thou been afraid to provoke the God of *Iſrael*, thine innocency had yielded no room to theſe terrors.

An horſeman is diſpatched to diſcover the meaning of this deſcried concourſe. He meets them, and inquires of peace; but receives a ſhort anſwer, *What haſt thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me.* A ſecond is addreſſed with the ſame ſucceſs. Both attend the train of *Jehu*, inſtead of returning. Indeed, it is not for private perſons to hope to rectify the public affairs, when they are grown to an height of diſorder, and from thence to a ripeneſs of miſcarriage. Sooner may a well-meaning man hurt himſelf, than redreſs the common danger.

Theſe meſſengers were now within the mercy of a multitude; had they but endeavoured to retire, they had periſhed as wilfully as vainly. Whoſoever will be ſtriving againſt the torrent of a juſt judgment, muſt needs be carried down in the ſtream. Sometimes there is as much wiſdom in yielding, as courage in reſiſtance.

Had this troop been far off, the watchman could not have deſcried the arrival of the meſſengers, their turning behind, the manner of the march. *Jehu* was a noted captain, his carriage and motion was obſerved more full of fire than his fellows: *The driving is like* Jehu's, *for he driveth furiouſly.* God makes choice of fit inſtruments, as of mercy, ſo of revenge. Theſe ſpirits were needful for ſo tragical a ſcene, as was now preparing in *Iſrael.*

Jehoram

Jehoram and *Ahaziah*, as nettled with this forced patience of expectation, can no longer keep their ſeats, but will needs haſten their chariots, and fetch that coſtly ſatisfaction which would not be ſent, but given.

They are infatuated which ſhall periſh, otherways *Jehoram* had been warned enough, by the forcible retention of his meſſengers, to expect none but an enemy. A friend or a ſubject could not have been unwilling to be known, to be looked for. Now, forgetting his wounds, he will go to fetch death.

Yet when he ſees *Jehu*, whom he left a ſubject, hopes ſtrive with his doubts, *Is it peace*, Jehu? What may be the reaſon of this ſudden journey? is the army foiled by the *Syrians?* is *Ramoth* recovered? or hath the flight of the enemy left thee no further work? or is ſome other ill news guilty of thy haſte? what means this unwiſhed preſence, and return?

There needs no ſtay for an anſwer; the very face of *Jehu*, and thoſe ſparkling eyes of his, ſpeak fury and death to *Jehoram*, which yet his tongue angerly ſeconds: *What peace, ſo long as the whoredoms of thy mother* Jezebel, *and her witchcrafts are ſo many?*

Wicked tyrant, what ſpeakeſt thou of peace with men, when thou haſt thus long waged war with the Almighty? that curſed mother of thine hath nurſed thee with blood, and trained thee up in abominable idolatries.

Thou art not more hers, than her ſin is thine; thou art polluted with her ſpiritual whoredoms, and enchanted with her helliſh witchcrafts: now that juſt God, whom thou and thy parents have ſo heinouſly deſpiſed, ſends thee by me this laſt meſſage of his vengeance: which, while he ſpake, his hand is drawing up that deadly arrow, which ſhall cure the former wounds with a worſe.

Too

Too late now doth wretched *Jehoram* turn his chariot and fly, and cry treaſon, O *Ahaziah!* There was treaſon before, O *Jehoram!* thy treaſon againſt the majeſty of God is now revenged by the treaſon of *Jehu* againſt thee.

That fatal ſhaft, notwithſtanding the ſwift pace of both the chariots, is directed to the heart of *Jehoram;* there is no erring of thoſe feathers which are guided by the hand of deſtiny.

How juſt are the judgments of God! it was in the field of *Naboth*, wherein *Jehoram* met with *Jehu;* that very ground called to him for blood. And now this new avenger remembers that prophecy which he heard out of the mouth of *Elijah*, in that very place, following the heels of *Ahab*, and is careful to perform it. Little did *Jehu* think, when he heard that meſſage of *Elijah*, that his hands ſhould act it. Now, as zealous of accompliſhing the word of a prophet, he gives charge to *Bidkar* his captain, that the bleeding carcaſe of *Jehoram* ſhould be caſt upon that very plat of *Naboth*. O *Naboth*'s blood well paid for! *Ahab*'s blood is licked by dogs, in the very place where thoſe dogs licked *Naboth*'s; *Jehoram*'s blood ſhall manure that ground, which was wrung from *Naboth*, and *Jezebel* ſhall add to this compoſt. O garden of herbs dearly bought, royally dunged!

What a reſemblance there is betwixt the death of the father and the ſon, *Ahab* and *Jehoram!* Both are ſlain in their chariot, both with an arrow, both repay their blood to *Naboth:* and how perfect is this retaliation! Not only *Naboth* miſcarried in that cruel injuſtice, but his ſons alſo; elſe the inheritance of the vineyard had deſcended to his heirs, notwithſtanding his pretended offence. And now, not only *Ahab* forfeits his blood to this field, but his ſon *Jehoram* alſo. Face doth not more anſwer to face, than puniſhment to ſin.

It

It was time for *Ahaziah* king of *Judah* to fly. Nay, it had been time long before to have fled from the ſins, yea, from the houſe of *Ahab*. That brand is fearful which God ſets upon him: *He did evil in the ſight of the Lord, as did the houſe of* Ahab, for he was the ſon-in-law of the houſe of *Ahab*. Affinity is too often guilty of corruption: the ſon of good *Jehoſaphat* is loſt in *Ahab*'s daughter.

Now he pays for his kind alliance, accompanying the ſon of *Ahab* in his death, whom he conſorted with in his idolatry. Young *Ahaziah* was ſcarce warm in his throne, when the miſ-matched blood of *Athaliah* is required from him. Nothing is more dangerous than to be imped in a wicked family; this relation too often draws in a ſhare both of ſin and puniſhment.

Who would not have looked that *Jezebel*, hearing of this bloody end of her ſon, and purſuit of her ally, and the fearful proceedings of this proſperous conſpiracy, ſhould have put herſelf into ſackcloth and aſhes; and now, finding no means either of defence or eſcape, ſhould have caſt herſelf into ſuch a poſture of humiliation, as might have moved the compaſſion of *Jehu?* Her proud heart could not ſuddenly learn to ſtoop; rather ſhe recollects her high ſpirits, and, inſtead of humbling her ſoul by repentance, and addreſſing herſelf for an imminent death, ſhe pranks up her old carcaſe, and paints her wrinkled face, and, as one that vainly hopes to daunt the courage of an uſurper, by the ſudden beams of majeſty, ſhe looks out, and thinks to fright him with the challenge of a traitor, whoſe either mercy or juſtice could not be avoided. Extremity finds us ſuch as our peace leaves us. Our laſt thoughts are ſpent upon that we care moſt for. Thoſe, that have regarded their face more than their ſoul, in their latter end are

are more taken up with deſire of ſeeming fair, than being happy. It is no marvel, if an heart, obdured with the cuſtom of ſin, ſhut up graceleſly. Counterfeit beauty agrees well with inward uncleanneſs.

Jehu's reſolution was too ſtrongly ſettled, to be removed with a painted face, or an opprobious tongue. He looks up to the window, and ſays, *Who is on my ſide, who?* There want not thoſe every where, which will be ready to obſerve prevailing greatneſs. Two or three eunuchs look out; he bids them *throw her down:* they inſtantly lay hold on their lately adored miſtreſs, and, notwithſtanding all her ſhrieks and prayers, caſt her down headlong into the ſtreet.

What heed is to be taken of the deep profeſſed ſervices of hollow-hearted followers? All this while they have humbly, with ſmiles and officious devotions, fawned upon their great queen; now, upon the call of a proſperous enemy, they forget their reſpects, her royalty, and caſt her down, as willing executioners, into the jaws of a fearful death. It is hard for greatneſs to know them whom it may truſt: perhaps the faireſt ſemblance is from the falſeſt heart. It was a juſt plague of God upon wicked *Jezebel*, that ſhe was inwardly hated of her own. He, whoſe ſervants ſhe perſecuted, raiſed up enemies to her from her own elbow.

Thus muſt pride fall; inſolent, idolatrous, cruel *Jezebel* beſprinkles the walls and pavement with her blood; and now thoſe brains, that deviſed miſchief againſt the ſervants of God, are ſtrewed upon the ſtones; and ſhe, that inſulted upon the prophets, is trampled upon by the horſes heels: *The wicked is kept for the day of deſtruction, and ſhall be brought forth to the day of wrath.*

Death puts an end commonly to the higheſt diſpleaſure. He, that was ſevere in the execution of

the living, is merciful in the ſepulture of the dead; *Go ſee now this curſed woman, and bury her, for ſhe is a king's daughter.* She, that upbraided *Jehu* with the name of *Zimri*, ſhall be interred by *Jehu* as *Omri*'s daughter-in-law, as a *Sidonian* princeſs; ſomewhat muſt be yielded to humanity, ſomewhat to ſtate.

The dogs have prevented *Jehu* in this purpoſe, and have given her a living tomb, more ignoble than the worſt of the earth; only the ſcull, hands and feet of that varniſhed carcaſe yet remain; the ſcull, which was the roof of all her wicked devices, the hands and feet, which were the executioners, theſe ſhall remain as the monuments of thoſe ſhameful exequies; that future times, ſeeing theſe fragments of a body, might ſay, the dogs were worthy of the reſt; thus *Jezebel* is turned to dung, and dogs meat; *Elijah* is verified, *Naboth* is revenged, *Jezreel* is purged, *Jehu* is zealous, and, in all, God is juſt.

CONTEM. III. JEHU *killing the ſons of* AHAB, *and the prieſts of* BAAL.

THERE were two prime cities of the ten tribes, which were the ſet courts of the kingdom of *Iſrael*, *Smaria* and *Jezreel;* the chief palace of the kingdom was *Jezreel*, the mother city of the kingdom was *Samaria; Jehu* is poſſeſſed of the one, without any ſword drawn againſt him: *Jezreel* willingly changes the maſter, yielding itſelf to the victor of two kings, to the avenger of *Jezebel;* the next care is *Samaria;* either policy or force ſhall fetch in that head of the tribes.

The plentiful iſſue of princes is no ſmall aſſurance to the people; *Ahab* had ſons enough to furniſh the thrones of all the neighbour nations, to maintain the hopes

hopes of ſucceſſion to all times. How ſecure did he think the perpetuation of his poſterity, when he ſaw ſeventy ſons from his own loins! Neither was this royal iſſue truſted, either to weak walls, or to one roof; but to the ſtrong bulwarks of *Samaria*, and therein to the ſeveral guards of the chief peers: it was the wiſe care of their parents, not to have them obnoxious to the danger of a common miſcarriage, or of thoſe emulations which wait upon the cloyedneſs of an undivided converſation, but to order their ſeparation ſo, as one may reſcue other from the peril of aſſault, as one may reſpect other out of a familiar ſtrangeneſs. Had *Ahab* and *Jezebel* been as wiſe for their ſouls, as they were for their ſeed, both had proſpered.

Jehu is yet but in his firſt act; if all the ſons of *Ahab* bleed not, the prophecy is unanſwered; there ſhall be no need of his ſword, his pen ſhall work all this ſlaughter. He writes a challenge to *Samaria*, and therein to the guardians of the ſons of *Ahab*, daring them, out of the confidence in their defenced city, in their chariots and horſes, in their aſſociates and arms, to ſet up the beſt of their maſter's ſons on his father's throne, and to fight for his ſucceſſion.

All the governors of *Ahab*'s children conſpire in one common fear; no doubt, there wanted not, in that numerous brood of kings, ſome great ſpirits, that, if at leaſt they attained to the notice of this deſign, longed for a revenge, and ſuggeſted counſels of reſolution to their cowardly guardians. Shall an audacious uſurper run thus away with the crown of *Iſrael*? Shall the blood of *Jezebel* be thus traiterouſly ſpilt, thus wilfully forgotten? O *Iſraelites*, can you be ſo baſe, as to be ruled by my father's ſervant! Where are the merits of *Ahab* and *Jehoram*? What is become of the royal courage of *Iſrael*? Doubtleſs ye ſhall not want able ſeconds to your valour; do ye think the

royal and potent alliances of our mother *Jezebel*, and the remaining heirs of *Judah*, can draw back their hands from your aid? will they endure to ſwallow ſo cruel an indignity? Stir up your aſtoniſhed fortitude, O ye nobles of *Iſrael!* redeem your bleeding honour, revenge this treacherous conſpirator, and eſtabliſh the right of the undoubted heirs of your ſovereign. But as warm clothes to a dead man, ſo are the motions of valour to a fearful heart. *Behold two kings ſtood not before him, how then ſhall we ſtand?*

Fear affrights itſelf rather than it will want bugs of terror. It is true, two kings fell before *Jehu*, but two kings unarmed, unguarded. Had not the ſurpriſal of *Jehu* taken advantage of the unſuſpicious nakedneſs of theſe two princes, his victory had not been thus ſucceſsful, thus eaſy. One of thoſe two kings, upon advertiſement and preparation, had abated the fury of that hot leader. It is the faſhion of fear to repreſent unto us always the worſt, in every event, not looking at the inequality of the advantages, but the miſery of the ſucceſs: as, contrarily, it is the guiſe of faith and valour, by the good iſſue of one enterpriſe, to raiſe up the heart to an expectation and aſſurance of more.

Theſe mens hearts are dead with their kings, neither dare entertain the hope of a ſafe and proſperous reſiſtance, but baſely return, *We are thy ſervants, and will do all that thou ſhalt bid us; we will not make any king; do thou that which is good in thine eyes.*

Well may *Jehu* think, Theſe men, which are thus diſloyal to their charge, cannot be faithful to me; it is their fear that draws them to this obſervation: were they not cowards, they would not be traitors to their princes, ſubjects to me: I may uſe their hands, but I will not truſt them. It is a thankleſs obedi-

obedience that is grounded upon fear; there can be no true fidelity without love and reverence. Neither is other betwixt God and us: if out of a dread of hell we be officious, who ſhall thank us for theſe reſpects to ourſelves?

As one that had taſted already the ſweetneſs of a reſolute expedition, *Jehu* writes back inſtantly, *If ye be mine, and if ye will hearken unto my voice, take ye the heads of the men your maſter's ſons, and come to me to* Jezreel *to-morrow this time.* Valiant *Jehu* was ſo well acquainted with the nature of fear, that he well knew this paſſion, once grown deſperate, would be ready to ſwallow all conditions; ſo far therefore doth his wiſdom improve it, as to make theſe peers his executioners, who preſently, upon the receipt of his charge turn cruel, and by a joint conſent fetch off the ſeventy heads of thoſe princes, whom they undertook to guard, whom they had flattered with the hopes of greater honour.

No doubt, but amongſt ſo many ſons of *Ahab*, ſome had ſo demeaned themſelves, that they had won zealous profeſſions of love from their guardians. Except, perhaps, death ſtole upon them in ſleep, what tears, what entreaties, what conjurations muſt here needs have been!

What have we done, O ye peers of *Iſrael*, that might deſerve this bloody meaſure? we are the ſons of *Ahab*, therefore have ye hitherto profeſſed to obſerve us: what change is this? why ſhould that, which hath hitherto kept you loyal, now make you cruel? is this the reward of the long peaceable government of our father? are theſe the trophies of *Ahab*'s victories againſt *Benhadad*, *Jehoram*'s againſt *Hazael?* If we may not reign, yet at leaſt let us live: or, if we muſt die, why will your hands be embrued in that blood which ye had wont to term royal and ſacred? why will ye of tutors turn murderers? All pleas are

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in vain to them that are deafened with their own fears. Perhaps these expostulations might have fetched some dews of pity from the eyes, and kisses from the lips of these unfaithful tutors, but cannot prevent the stroke of death. These crocodiles weep upon those whom they must kill; and if their own sons had been in the place of *Ahab*'s, doubtless they had been sacrificed to the will of an usurper, to the parent's safety. It is ill relying upon timorous natures; upon every occasion, those crazy reeds will break, and run into our hands. How worthy were *Ahab* and *Jezebel* of such friends? They had been ever false to God, how should men be true to them? They had sold themselves to work wickedness, and now they are requited with a mercenary fidelity: for a few lines have these men sold all the heads of *Ahab*'s posterity. Could ever the policy of *Jezebel* have reached so far, as to suspect the possibility of the extirpation of so ample an issue, in one night, by the hands of her trustiest subjects?

Now she, that by her letters sent to the elders of *Jezreel*, shed the blood of *Naboth* and his sons, hath the blood of all her sons shed, by a letter sent from *Jezreel* to the elders of *Samaria*. At last, God will be sure to come out of the debt of wicked sinners, and will pay them with that coin, which is both most proper, and least looked for.

Early in the morning, in that gate of *Jezreel* where *Ahab* had passed many an unjust sentence, is presented unto *Jehu* the fearful pledge of his sovereignty, seventy ghastly heads of the sons of *Ahab*.

Some carnal eye, that had seen so many young and smooth faces besmeared with blood, would have melted into compassion, bemoaning their harmless age, their untimely end. It is not for the justice of God to stand at the bar of our corrupted judgment. Except we include some grandchildren of *Ahab* within this number, none of these died before they were seasoned

ſoned with horrible idolatry; or, if they had, they were in the loins of *Ahab* when he ſold himſelf to work wickedneſs; and now it is juſt with God to puniſh *Ahab*'s wickedneſs in this fruit of his loins. The holy ſeverity of God, in the revenge of ſin, ſometimes goes ſo far, that our ignorance is ready to miſtake it for cruelty.

The wonder and horror of thoſe two heaps hath eaſily drawn together the people of *Jezreel*. *Jehu* meets them in that ſeat of public judgment; and, finding much amazedneſs and paſſionate confuſion in their faces, he clears them, and ſends them to the true original of theſe ſudden and aſtoniſhing maſſacres.

However his own conſpiracy, and the cowardly treachery of the princes of *Iſrael* had been, not without their heinous ſin, the viſible means of this judgment, yet he directs their eyes to an higher authority, the juſt decree of the Almighty, manifeſted by his ſervant *Elijah*, who, even by the willing ſins of men, can moſt wiſely, moſt hoſtilely fetch about his moſt righteous and bleſſed purpoſes.

If the peers of *Samaria* out of a baſe fear, if *Jehu* out of an ambition of reigning, ſhed the foul blood of *Ahab*'s poſterity, the ſin is their own, but, in the mean time, the act is no other than what the infinite juſtice of God would juſtly work by their miſintentions. Let theſe *Iſraelites* but look up from earth to heaven, theſe tragical changes cannot trouble them; thither *Jehu* ſends them, wiping off the envy of all this blood, by the warrant of the divine pre-ordination. In obedience whereunto, he ſends after theſe heirs of *Ahab* all his kinſfolks, favourites, prieſts, that remained in *Jezreel*; and now, having cleared theſe coaſts, he haſtens to *Samaria*: whom ſhould he meet with in the way, but the brethren of *Ahaziah* king of *Judah*, they are going to viſit their couſins the ſons of *Ahab*. This young troop was thinking of nothing

nothing but jollity, and courtly entertainment, when they meet with death. So ſuddenly, ſo ſecretly had *Jehu* diſpatched theſe bold executions, that theſe princes could imagine no cauſe of ſuſpicion. How could they think it might be dangerous to be known for the brethren of *Ahaziah*, or friends to the brethren of *Jehoram?* The juſt providence of the Almighty hath brought all this covey under one net. *Jehu* thinks it not ſafe to let go ſo many avengers of *Ahaziah*'s blood, ſo many corrivals of his ſovereignty. The unhappy affinity of *Jehoſaphat* with *Ahab* is no leſs guilty of this ſlaughter than *Jehu*'s ambition: this match, by the inoculation of one bud, hath tainted all the ſap of the houſe of *Judah*. The two and forty brethren of *Ahaziah* are therefore ſent after the ſeventy ſons of *Ahab*, that they may overtake them in death, whom they came to viſit: God will much leſs brook idolatry from the loins of a *Jehoſaphat*. Our entireneſs with wicked men feoffs us both in their ſins and judgments.

Doubtleſs, many *Iſraelites*, that were devoted to the family and allies of *Ahab*, looked, (what they durſt) awry at this common effuſion of royal blood; yet, in the worſt of the depravedneſs of *Iſrael*, there were ſome which both drooped under the deplored idolatry of the times, and congratulated to *Jehu* this ſevere vindication of God's inheritance: amongſt the reſt, *Jonadab* the ſon of *Rechab* was moſt eminent. That man was by deſcent derived from *Jethro*, a *Midianite* by nation, but incorporated into *Iſrael*; a man, whoſe piety and ſtrict converſation did both teach and ſhame thoſe twelve tribes to which he was joined. He was the author of an auſtere rule of civility to his poſterity, to whom he debarred the uſe of wines, cities, poſſeſſions. This old and rough friend of *Jehu*, out of his moving habitations, meets him, and applauds his ſucceſs. He that allowed not wine

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to his ſeed, allows the blood of *Ahab*'s ſeed poured out by the hand of *Jehu*: he, that ſhunned the city, is carried in *Jehu*'s chariot to the palace of *Samaria*.

How eaſily might *Jehu* have been deceived! Many a one profeſſes uprightneſs, who yet is all guile. *Jonadab*'s carriage hath been ſuch, that his word merits truſt. It is a bleſſing upon the plain-hearted, that they can be believed. Honeſt *Jonadab* is admitted to the honour of *Jehu*'s ſeat, and called, inſtead of many, to witneſs the zeal of the new anointed king of *Iſrael*.

While *Jehu* had to do with kings, his cunning and his courage held equal pace together; but now, that he is to deal with idolatrous prieſts, his wile goes along, and prevails: He calls the people together, and, diſſembling his intentions, ſays, Ahab *ſerved* Baal *a little, but* Jehu *ſhall ſerve him much: now therefore call unto me all the prophets of* Baal, *all his ſervants, and all his prieſts, let none be wanting; for I have a great ſacrifice to do to* Baal: *whoſoever ſhall be wanting, he ſhall not live.*

What a dead paleneſs was there now in the faces of thoſe few true-hearted *Iſraelites*, that looked for an happy reſtoration of the religion of God! How could they chuſe but think, alas, how are we fallen from our hopes? is this the change we looked for? was it only ambition that hath ſet this edge upon the ſword of *Jehu?* It was not the perſon of *Ahab* that we diſliked, but the ſins; if thoſe muſt ſtill ſucceed, what have we gained? Wo be to us, if only the author of our miſery be changed, not the condition, not the cauſe of our miſery.

On the other ſide, what inſultations and triumphs ſounded everywhere of the joyful *Baalites!* what glorying of the truth of their profeſſion, becauſe of the ſucceſs! what ſcorns of their dejected oppoſites! what exprobrations of the diſappointed hopes, and pre-

dictions of their adverſe prophets! what promiſes to themſelves of a perpetuity of *Baaliſm!* How did the diſperſed prieſts of *Baal* now flock together, and applaud each others happineſs, and magnify the devotions of their new ſovereign! Never had that idol ſo glorious a day as this for the pomp of his ſervice; before, he was adored ſingly in corners, now ſolemn ſacrifices ſhall be offered to him by all his clients, in the great temple of the mother city of *Iſrael.* I can commend the zeal of *Jehu*, I cannot commend the fraud of *Jehu.* We may come to our end, even by crooked ways. He that bade him to ſmite for him, did not bid him to lie for him. Falſhood, though it be but tentative, is neither needed nor approved by the God of truth. If policy have allowed officious untruths, religion never.

By this device the houſe of *Baal* is well furniſhed, well filled; not one of his *Chemarim* either might or would be abſent: not one of thoſe which were preſent might be unrobed. Falſe Gods have ever affected to imitate the true: even *Baal* hath temples, altars, prieſts, veſtments: all religions have allotted peculiar habits to their higheſt devotions. Theſe veſtments, which they miſ-called ſacred, are brought forth and put on, for the glory of this ſervice.

Jehu and *Jonadab* are firſt careful that this ſeparation be exact: they ſearch and ſee that no ſervant of the Lord be crept into that throng. What ſhould a religious *Iſraelite* do in the temple of *Baal?* were any ſuch there, he had deſerved their ſmart, who would partake with their worſhip; but if curioſity ſhould have drawn any thither, the mercy of *Jehu* ſeeks his reſcue. How much more favourable is the God of mercies, in not taking advantage of our infirmities!

Well

Well might this ſearch have bred ſuſpicion, were it not, that in all thoſe idolatrous ſacrifices, the firſt care was to avoid the profane: even *Baal* would admit no mixture, how ſhould the true God abide it?

Nothing wanted now, but the ſacrifice. No doubt whole herds and flocks were ready for a pretence of ſome royal hecatombs, whereof ſome had now already ſmoked on their altars. O *Jehu*, what means this dilation? if thou abhorreſt *Baal*, why didſt thou give way to this laſt ſacrifice? why didſt thou not cut off theſe idolaters, before this upſhot of their wickedneſs? was it, that thou mightſt be ſure of their guiltineſs? was it that their number, together with their ſin, might be complete? What acclamations were here to *Baal!* what joy in the freedom of their revived worſhip! when all on the ſudden, thoſe, that had ſacrificed, are ſacrificed. The ſoldiers of *Jehu*, by his appointment, ruſh in with their ſwords drawn, and turn the temple into a ſlaughter-houſe. How is the tune now changed! what ſhrieking was here! what out-cries! what running from one ſword to the edge of another! what ſcrambling up the walls and pillars! what climbing into the windows! what vain endeavours to eſcape that death which would not be ſhunned! whether running, or kneeling, or proſtrate, they muſt die.

The firſt part of the ſacrifice was *Baal*'s, the latter is God's. The blood of beaſts was offered in the one, of men in the other: the ſhedding of this was ſo much the more acceptable to God, by how much theſe men were more beaſts than thoſe they ſacrificed. O happy obedience! God was pleaſed with a ſacrifice from the houſe of *Baal*: the idolaters are ſlain, the idols burnt, the houſe of *Baal* turned to a draught, though even thus leſs unclean, leſs noiſome, than in the former perfumes; and, in one word, *Baal* is deſtroyed out of *Iſrael*.

Who that had ſeen all this zeal for God, would not have ſaid, *Jehu* is a true *Iſraelite?* Yet he, that rooted out *Ahab*, would not be rid of *Jeroboam:* he, that deſtroyed *Baal*, maintained the two calves of *Dan* and *Bethel*. That idolatry was of a lower rank, as being a miſ-worſhip of the true God; whereas the other was a worſhip of the falſe. Even the eaſier of both is heinous, and ſhall rob *Jehu* of the praiſe of his uprightneſs.

A falſe heart may laudably quit itſelf of ſome one groſs ſin, and in the mean time hug ſome leſſer evil that may condemn it; as a man recovered of a fever may die of a jaundice, or a dropſy: we loſe the thank of all, if we wilfully fail in one.

It is an entire goodneſs that God cares for: perhaps, ſuch is the bounty of our God, a partial obedience may be rewarded with a temporal bleſſing; (as *Jehu*'s ſeverity to *Ahab* ſhall carry the crown to his ſeed for four generations) but we can never have any comfortable aſſurance of an eternal retribution, if our hearts and ways be not perfect with God. Wo be to us, O God, if we be not all thine! we cannot but everlaſtingly depart from thee, if we depart not from every ſin. Thou haſt purged our hearts from the *Baal* of our groſs idolatries; O clear us from the golden calves of our petty corruptions alſo, that thou mayſt take pleaſure in our uprightneſs, and we may reap the ſweet comforts of thy glorious remuneration!

CONTEM. IV. ATHALIAH *and* JOASH.

OH the woful ruins of the houſe of good *Jehoſaphat!* *Jehu* hath ſlain two and forty of his iſſue; *Athaliah* hopes to root out the reſt. This daughter of *Ahab* was not like to be other than fatal to that holy line; one drop of that wicked blood was enough, both to impure and ſpill all the reſt, which affinity had mixed with it. It

It is not unlike, that *Ahaziah*, betaking himſelf to the ſociety of *Jehoram*'s wars, committed the ſway of his ſceptre to his mother *Athaliah*. The daughter of *Jezebel* cannot but be plotting: when ſhe hears of the death of *Ahaziah* and his brethren, inflicted by the heavy hand of *Jehu*, ſhe ſtraight caſts for the kingdom of *Judah*. The true heirs are infants; their minority gives her both colour of rule, and opportunity of an eaſy extirpation. Perhaps her ambition was not more guilty, than her zeal of *Baaliſm*: ſhe ſaw *Jehu*, out of a deteſtation of idolatry, trampling on the blood of *Jehoram*, *Jezebel*, *Ahaziah*, the ſons of *Ahab*, the brethren of *Ahaziah*, the prieſts and prophets of *Baal*, and, in one word, triumphing in the deſtruction both of *Ahab* and his gods out of *Iſrael*; and now ſhe thinks, Why ſhould not I deſtroy *Jehoſaphat* and his god out of *Judah*?

Who ever ſaw an idolater that was not cruel? *Athaliah* muſt needs let out ſome of her own blood out of the throat of *Ahaziah*'s ſons; yet ſhe ſpares not to ſhed it out of a thirſt of ſovereignty. O God, how worthy of wonder are thy juſt and merciful diſpenſations! in that thou ſuffereſt the ſeed of good *Jehoſaphat* to be deſtroyed by her hand, in whoſe affinity he offended, and yet ſaveſt one branch of this ſtock of *Jehoſaphat*, for the ſake of ſo faithful a progenitor.

Wicked *Athaliah*, couldſt thou think God would ſo far forget his ſervant *David*, though no other of thoſe loins had ſeconded his virtues, as to ſuffer all his ſeed to be rooted out of the earth? This vengeance was for thy father *Ahab*. The man, according to God's own heart, ſhall have a lineal heir to ſucceed in his throne, when thou and thy father's houſe ſhall have vaniſhed into forgetfulneſs.

For this purpoſe hath the wiſe Providence of God ordained a *Jehoſheba*, and matched her in the prieſtly tribe. Such reverence did *Jehoram* king of *Judah*, though

though degenerated into the idolatry of his father-in-law *Ahab*, bear to this ſacred function, that he marries his daughter to *Jehoiada* the prieſt. Even princeſſes did not then ſcorn the bed of thoſe that ſerved at God's altar. Why ſhould the goſpel pour contempt upon that which the law honoured?

That good lady had too much of *Jehoſaphat* in her, to ſuffer the utter extirpation of that royal ſeed: ſhe could not, doubtleſs, without the extreme danger of her own life, ſave the life of her nephew *Joaſh*: with what a loving boldneſs doth ſhe adventure to ſteal him from amongſt thoſe bleeding carcaſes in the chamber of death! Her match gave her opportunity to effect that, which both nature and religion moved her to attempt: neither know I, whether more to wonder at the cunning of the device, or the courage of the enterpriſe; or the ſecrecy of the concealment, or the happineſs of the ſucceſs. Certainly *Athaliah* was too cruelly careful to forget this ſo late born ſon of *Ahaziah*; of all the reſt, his age would not ſuffer him to be out of her eye. In all likelihood therefore ſhe muſt needs have miſſed ſo noted a corpſe, had there not been a ſubſtitution of ſome other dead child in his room: in that age, the favour is not ſo diſtinguiſhable, eſpecially of a dead face. Without ſome pious deceit, this work could never have been effected; elſe had the child been ſecretly ſubduced, and miſſed by his bloody grandmother: her perpetual jealouſy had both expected a ſurviving heir, and continued a curious and unavoidable ſearch; both which were now ſhunned at once, whilſt *Athaliah* reckons him for dead, whom *Jehoſheba* hath preſerved. Miſchief ſometimes fails of thoſe appointments, wherein it thinks to have made the ſureſt work; God laughs in heaven at the plots of tyrants, and befools them in their deepeſt projects. He had ſaid to *David*, *Of the fruit*

fruit of thy body will I ſet upon thy ſeat; in vain ſhall earth and hell conſpire to fruſtrate it.

Six years hath *Joaſh* and his nurſe been hid in a cloſe cell of the temple: thoſe rooms were deſtined only to the holy tribe; yet now rejoice to harbour ſuch a gueſt: the rigour of the ordinary law muſt yield to caſes of ſo important neceſſity.

All this could not poſſibly be done, and continued, without the privity of many faithful prieſts and *Levites*, who were as careful to keep this counſel, as hopeful of the iſſue of it. It is not hard for many honeſt hearts to agree in a religious ſecrecy; needs muſt thoſe lips be ſhut, which God hath ſealed up.

Judah hath not been uſed to ſuch a yoke; long had it groaned under the tyranny, not of a woman only, but of an idolatrous *Sidonian:* if any of that ſex might have claimed that ſceptre, none had ſo much right to it as *Jehoſheba* herſelf. But good *Jehoiada* the prieſt, who had rather to be a loyal guardian to the king, than an huſband to a queen, now finds time to ſet on foot the juſt title of *Joaſh*, and to put him into the miſuſurped throne of his father *Ahaziah*.

In the ſeventh year, therefore, he ſends for the captains, and the guard; and, having ſworn them ſecrecy, by undoubted witneſſes, makes faith unto them of the truth of their native prince, thus happily reſcued from the bloody knife of his mercileſs grandmother, marſhals the great buſineſs of his inauguration, gives every one his charge, ſets every one his ſtation, and ſo diſpoſes his holy forces, as was moſt needful for the ſafety of the king, the revenge of the uſurper, the prevention of tumults, the eſtabliſhment of the crown upon the owner's head in peace and joy.

There was none of all theſe agents, who did not hold the buſineſs to be his own; every true ſubject of *Judah* was feelingly intereſted in this ſervice; neither

was

was there any of them, who was not ſecretly heart-burned, all this while, with the grateful government of this idolatrous tyranneſs: and now this inward fire is glad to find a vent; how gladly do they addreſs themſelves to this welcome employment! The greateſt part of this ſecret band were *Levites*, who might therefore both meet together with leaſt ſuſpicion, and be more ſecurely truſted by *Jehoiada*, under whom they ſerved. Even that holy prieſt of God, inſtead of teaching the law, ſets the guard, orders the captains, ranges the troops of *Judah*; and, inſtead of a cenſer, brings forth the ſpears and ſhields of *David*; the temple is for the preſent a field, or an artillery-yard; and the ephods are turned into harneſs. That houſe, in the rearing whereof not the noiſe of an hammer might be heard, now admits of the claſhing of armour, and the ſecret murmurs of ſome military atchievement. No circumſtances, either of place or calling, are ſo punctual, as that public neceſſity may not diſpenſe with their alteration.

All things are now ready for this ſolemnity: each man rejoices to fix upon his own footing; and longs to ſee the face of their long-concealed ſovereign, and vows his blood to the vindication of the common liberty, to the puniſhment of a cruel intruder. Now *Jehoiada* brings forth unto them the king's ſon, and preſents him to the peers and people; hardly can the multitude contain itſelf from ſhouting out too ſoon; one ſees in his countenance the features of his father *Ahaziah*, another of his grandfather *Jehoram*, a third profeſſes to diſcern in him ſome lines and faſhion of his great grandfather *Jehoſaphat*; all find in his face the natural impreſſions of majeſty, and read in it the hopes, yea the prophecies of their future happineſs. Not with more joy, than ſpeed, doth *Jehoiada* accompliſh all the rites of the coronation. Before that young king could know what was done to him,

him, he is anointed, crowned, preſented with the book of the law. Thoſe ceremonies were inſtructive, and no doubt *Jehoiada* failed not to comment upon them in due time to that royal pupil.

The oil, wherewith he was anointed, ſignified his deſignation to that high ſervice; and thoſe endowments from heaven, that might enable him to ſo great a function.

The crown, wherewith he was adorned, ſignified that glory and majeſty which ſhould both encourage and attend his princely cares.

The book of the teſtimony ſignified the divine rules and directions, whereto he muſt frame his heart and actions, in the wielding of that crown, in the improvement of that oil.

Theſe three, the oil, the crown, the teſtimony, that is, inward powers, outward magnificence, true piety and juſtice, make up a perfect prince; none of theſe may be wanting: if there be not a due calling of God, and abilities meet for that greatneſs, the oil faileth; if there be not a majeſtic grace and royalty that may command reverence, the crown is miſſing; if there be not a careful reſpect to the law of God, as the abſolute guide of all counſels and determinations, the teſtimony is neglected: all of them concurring, make both king and people happy.

Now it is time for the people to clap their hands, and by their loud acclamations to witneſs their joy, which muſt needs break forth with ſo much more force, by how much it was longer, upon fears and policy, ſuppreſſed.

The court and temple were near together; however it was with *Athaliah*, and the late revolted princes of *Judah*, according to the common word, The nearer to the church, the farther from God: their religious predeceſſors held it the greateſt commodity of their houſe, that it neighboured upon the houſe

of God. From her palace, might *Athaliah* eaſily hear the joyful ſhouts of the multitude, the loud noiſe of the trumpets; and, as aſtoniſhed with this new tumult of public gratulations, ſhe comes running into the temple. Never had her foot trod upon that holy pavement till now, that ſhe came to fetch a juſt revenge from that God whoſe worſhip ſhe had contemned.

It fell out well, that her ſudden amazedneſs called her forth, without the attendance of any ſtrong guard, whoſe ſide-taking might have made that quarrel mutually bloody. She ſoon hears and ſees what ſhe likes not; her ear meets with, God ſave the king; her eye meets with the unlooked for heir of the kingdom, ſitting on his throne, crowned and robed in the royal faſhion, guarded with the captains and ſoldiers, proclaimed by the trumpeters, acclaimed and applauded by the people.

Who can ſay, whether this ſight drove her more near to phrenſy, or death? how could it be otherways, when thoſe great ſpirits of hers, that had been long uſed to an uncontrolled ſovereignty, find themſelves ſo unexpectedly ſuppreſſed?

She now rends her clothes, and cries, Treaſon, treaſon, as if that voice of hers could ſtill command all hearts, all hands; as if one breath of hers were powerful enough to blow away all theſe new deſigns. O *Athaliah!* to whom doſt thou complain thyſelf; they are thy juſt executioners wherewith thou art encompaſſed: if it be treaſon to ſet up the true heir of *Ahaziah*, thou appealeſt to thy traitors: the treaſon was thine, theirs is juſtice. The time is now come of thy reckonings for all the royal blood of *Judah*, which thine ambition ſhed; wonder rather at the patience of this long forbearance, than the rigour of this execution.

There

There needs no formal ſeat of juſtice in ſo apparent offence. *Jehoiada* paſſes the ſentence of death upon her; *Have her forth of the ranges, let her not be ſlain in the houſe of the Lord; and him that followeth her kill with the ſword.*

Had not this uſurpation been palpable, *Jehoiada* would not have preſumed to intermeddle. Now, being both the prieſt of God, and uncle and protector to the lawful king, he doth that out of the neceſſity of the ſtate, which his infant ſovereign, if he could have been capable of thoſe thoughts, would have deſired.

Violent hands are laid upon *Athaliah*, whom, no doubt, a proud and furious diſdain of ſo quick a charge, and of ſo rough an uſage, made miſerably impatient. Now ſhe frowns and calls, and ſhrieks and commands, and threatens and reviles, and entreats in vain, and dies with as much ill-will from herſelf, as ſhe lived with the ill-will of her repining ſubjects.

I ſee not any one man of all her late flatterers that follow her, either for pity or reſcue. Every man willingly gives her up to juſtice; not one ſword is drawn in her defence, not one eye laments her. Such is the iſſue of a tyrannical miſgovernment; that which is obeyed not without ſecret haſte, is loſt not without public joy.

How like is *Athaliah* to her mother *Jezebel!* as in conditions and carriage, ſo even in death; both killed violently, both killed under their own walls, both ſlain with treaſon in their mouths, both ſlain in the entrance of a changed government; one trod on by the horſes, the other ſlain in the horſe-gate: both paid their own blood for the innocent blood of others.

How ſuddenly, how eaſily is *Judah* reſtored to itſelf, after ſo long, and ſo fearful a depravation! The people ſcarce believe their own eyes, for the wonder

of this happy change: neither know I, whether they be more joyed in the ſight of their new king thus ſtrangely preſerved, or in the ſight of *Jehoiada* that had preſerved him.

No man can envy the protection of the young king unto him, by whoſe means he lives and reigns. That holy man cares only to improve his authority to the common good: *He makes a covenant between the Lord, and the king, and the people:* and, after ſo long and dangerous a disjunction, reunites them to each other. Their revived zeal beſtirs itſelf, and breaks down the temples, and altars, and images of *Baal*, and ſacrifices his idolatrous prieſts. Shortly both *Ahab* and *Baal* are deſtroyed out of *Judah*.

The ſceptre of *Judah* is changed from a woman to a child; but, a child trained up and tutored by *Jehoiada*. This minority, ſo guided, was not inferior to the mature age of many predeceſſors. Happy is that land, the non-age of whoſe princes falls into holy and juſt hands: yet, even theſe holy and juſt hands came ſhort of what they might have done. The high places remained ſtill; thoſe altars were erected to the true God, but in a wrong place. It is marvel, if there be not ſome blemiſhes found in the beſt government: I doubt *Jehoiada* ſhall once buy it dear, that he did not his utmoſt.

But for the main, all was well with *Judah*, in all the days of *Jehoiada*, even after that *Joaſh* was grown paſt his pupillage. He that was the tutor to his infancy, was the counſellor of his ripe age, and was equally happy in both. How pleaſing was it to that good high prieſt, to be commanded by that charge of his in the buſineſs of God! The young king gives order to the prieſts, for the collection of large ſums, to the repairing of the breaches of God's houſe. It becomes him well to take care of that, which was the nurſery

nurſery of his infancy: and now, after three and twenty years, he expoſtulates with his late guardian *Jehoiada*, and the reſt of his coat, *Why repair ye not the breaches?*

O gracious and happy viciſſitude! *Jehoiada* the prieſt had ruled the infancy of king *Joaſh* in matters of ſtate, and now *Joaſh* the king commands aged *Jehoiada* the prieſt in matter of devotion. In the affairs of God, the action is the prieſt's, the overſight and coaction is the prince's: by the careful endeavour of both, God's houſe is repaired, his ſervice flouriſheth.

But alas! that it may too well appear, that the ground of this devotion was not altogether inward, no ſooner doth the life of *Jehoiada* ceaſe, than the devotion of *Joaſh* begins to languiſh; and, after ſome languor, dies.

The benefit of a truly religious prelate, or ſtateſman, is not known till his loſs.

Now, ſome idolatrous peers of *Judah* have ſoon miſcarried the king, from the houſe of the Lord God of their fathers, to ſerve groves and idols. Yea, whither go we wretched men, if we be left by our Maker? King *Joaſh* is turned, not idolater only, but perſecutor; yea, which is yet more horrible to conſider, perſecutor of the ſon of that *Jehoiada* to whom he owes his own life. *Zechariah*, his couſin-german, his foſter-brother, the holy iſſue of thoſe parents by whom *Joaſh* lives and reigns, for the conſcionable rebuke of the idolatry of prince and people, is unjuſtly and cruelly murdered by that unthankful hand. How poſſible is it for fair and ſaint-like beginnings to ſhut up in monſtrous impieties! Let him that thinks he ſtands, take heed leſt he fall. When did God ever put up ſo foul ingratitude to himſelf, to his ſervants? O *Joaſh!* what eyes can pity the fearful deſtruction of thee and thy *Judah?*

If

If ye have forgotten the kindneſs of *Jehoiada*, your unkindneſs to *Jehoiada* ſhall not be forgotten. *A ſmall army of* Syrians *came up againſt* Judah *and* Jeruſalem, *and deſtroyed all the princes of the people, and ſent all the ſpoil of them to* Damaſcus. Now *Hazael* revenges this quarrel of God, and his anointed, and plagues that people which made themſelves unworthy to be the Lord's inheritance.

And what becomes of *Joaſh?* he is left in great diſeaſes, when his own ſervants conſpired againſt him *for the blood of the ſons of* Jehoiada, *and ſlew him on his bed, and he died; and they buried him not in the ſepulchre of the kings.* Dying *Zechariah* had ſaid, in the bitterneſs of his departing ſoul, *The Lord look upon it, and require it.* I confeſs, I had rather to have heard him ſay, *The Lord paſs it over, and remit it:* ſo ſaid *Stephen.* Such difference there is between a martyr of the law and of the goſpel; although I will hope the zeal of juſtice, not the uncharitable heat of revenge, drew forth this word. God hears it, and now gives an account of his notice. Thus doth the Lord require the blood of *Jehoiada's* ſon, even by the like unthankful hand of the obliged ſervants of *Joaſh.* He, that was guilty of abominable idolatry, yet, as if God meant to wave that challenge, is called to reckoning for his cruel unthankfulneſs to *Jehoiada:* this crime ſhall make him odious alive, and ſhall abandon him dead from the ſepulchre of his fathers; as if this laſt royalty were too good for him, who had forgotten the law of humanity. Some vices are ſuch, as nature ſmiles upon, though frowned at by divine juſtice. Others are ſuch, as even nature herſelf abhors; ſuch is this of ingratitude, which therefore carries ſo much more deteſtation from God, as it is more odious even to them that have blotted out the image of God.

CONTEM. V. JOASH *with* ELISHA *dying.*

THE two kingdoms of *Judah* and *Iſrael*, however divided both in government and affection, yet loved to interchange the names of their kings: even *Iſrael* alſo had their *Joaſh*, no better than that of *Judah*; he was not more the father of the latter *Jeroboam*, than, in reſpect of miſworſhip, he was the ſon of the firſt *Jeroboam*, who made *Iſrael* to ſin. Thoſe calves of *Dan* and *Bethel*, out of a politic miſdevotion, beſotted all the ſucceſſion of the ten uſurped tribes. Yet even this idolatrous king of *Iſrael* comes down to viſit the ſick-bed of *Eliſha*, and weeps upon his face.

That holy prophet was never any flatterer of princes, neither ſpared he invectives againſt their moſt plauſible ſins: yet king *Joaſh*, that was beaten by his reproofs, waſhes that face with the tears of love and ſorrow, which had often frowned upon his wickedneſs.

How much difference there was betwixt the *Joaſh* of *Iſrael*, andthe *Joaſh* of *Judah*? that of *Judah*, having been preſerved and nurtured by *Jehoiada* the prieſt, after all profeſſions of dearneſs, ſhuts up in the unkind murder of his ſon, and that merely for the juſt reproof of his own idolatry; this of *Iſrael*, having been eſtranged from the prophet *Eliſha*, and ſharply rebuked for the like offence, makes love to his dying reprover, and bedews his pale face with his tears. Both were bad enough; but this of *Iſrael* was, however vicious, yet good-natured: that of *Judah* added to his wickedneſs an ill diſpoſition, a dogged humour. There are varieties even of evil men; ſome are worſe at the root, others at the branch; ſome more civilly harmleſs, others fouller in morality. According to the exerciſe of the reſtraining grace, natural men do either riſe or fall in their ill.

The

The longeſt day muſt have his evening. Good *Eliſha*, that had lived ſome ninety years, a wonder of prophets, and had outworn many ſucceſſions in the thrones of *Iſrael* and *Judah*, is now caſt upon the bed of his ſickneſs, yea of his death. That very age might ſeem a diſeaſe, which yet is ſeconded with a languiſhing diſtemper. It is not in the power of any holineſs to privilege us from infirmity of body, from final diſſolution. He that ſtretched himſelf upon his bed, over the dead carcaſe of the *Shunamite's* ſon, and revived it, muſt now ſtretch out his own limbs upon his ſick-bed, and die. He ſaw his maſter *Elijah* rapt up ſuddenly from the earth, and fetched by a fiery chariot from this vale of mortality; himſelf muſt leiſurely wait for his laſt pangs, in a lingering paſſage to the ſame glory. There is not one way appointed to us, by the divine Providence, unto one common bleſſedneſs: one hath more pain, another hath more ſpeed: violence ſnatcheth away one; another, by an inſenſible pace, draws every day nearer to his term: the wiſdom and goodneſs of God magnifies itſelf in both. Happy is he, that, after due preparation, is paſt through the gates of death, ere he be aware. Happy is he, that, by the holy uſe of long ſickneſs, is taught to ſee the gates of death afar off, and addreſſed for a reſolute paſſage: the one dies like *Elijah*, the other like *Eliſha*, both bleſſedly.

The time was, when a great king ſent to *Eliſha*, to know if he ſhould recover: now the king of *Iſrael*, as knowing that *Eliſha* ſhall not recover, ſo had his conſumption ſpent him, comes to viſit the dying prophet; and, when his tears would give him leave, breaks forth into a paſſionate exclamation; *O my father, my father, the chariots of* Iſrael, *and the horſemen thereof!* Yet the calves of *Dan* and *Bethel* have left ſome goodneſs in *Joaſh*: as the beſt man hath ſomething in him worthy of reproof, ſo the faultieſt

faultieſt hath ſomething commendable. Had not the Spirit of God himſelf told us, that *Joaſh* did that which was evil in the ſight of the Lord, we had admired this piety, this reverend reſpect to the prophet. The holieſt man could not have ſaid more. It is poſſible for the clients of a falſe worſhip to honour, out of another regard, the profeſſors of truth. From the hand of *Eliſha* had *Jehu*, the grandfather of *Joaſh*, received his unction to the kingdom; this favour might not be forgotten.

Viſitation of the ſick is a duty required both by the law of humanity, and of religion. Bodily infirmity is ſad and comfortleſs; and therefore needs the preſence and counſel of friends to relieve it: although, when we draw the curtains of thoſe that are eminently gracious, we do rather fetch, with *Joaſh*, than bring a bleſſing.

How ſenſible ſhould we be of the loſs of holy men, when a *Joaſh* ſpends his tears upon *Eliſha*? If we be more affected with the foregoing of a natural friend, or kinſman, than of a noted and uſeful prophet, it argues more love to ourſelves, than to the church of God, than to God himſelf.

What uſe there was of chariots and horſemen in thoſe wars of the ancients, all hiſtories can tell us; all the ſtrength of the battle ſtood in theſe; there could be neither defence nor offence but by them: ſuch was *Eliſha* unto *Iſrael*. The greateſt ſafeguard to any nation is the ſanctity and faithfulneſs of their prophets, without which the church and ſtate lies open to utter deſolation.

The ſame words that *Eliſha* ſaid of his maſter *Elijah*, when he ſaw him taken up from the earth, doth *Joaſh* now ſpeak of *Eliſha*, near his diſſolution; *O my father, my father, the chariots of* Iſrael, *and the horſemen thereof!* The words were good, the tears were pious, but where are the actions? O

Joaſh! if the prophet were thy father, where was thy filial obedience? he cried down thy calves, thou upheldſt them; he counſelled thee to good, thou didſt evil in the ſight of the Lord.

If the prophet was the chariot and horſemen of *Iſrael*, why didſt thou fight againſt his holy doctrine? if thou weepedſt for his loſs, why didſt thou not weep for thoſe ſins of thine that procured it.

Had thine hand anſwered thy tongue, *Iſrael* had been happy in *Eliſha*, *Eliſha* had been happy in *Iſrael* and thee. Words are no good trial of profeſſion: the worſt men may ſpeak well. Actions have only the power to deſcry hypocrites.

Yet even a *Joaſh*, thus complying, ſhall not go away unbleſſed. This outward kindneſs ſhall receive an outward retribution. Theſe few drops of warm water, ſhed upon the face of a prophet, ſhall not loſe their reward. The ſpirit of prophecy forſakes not the death-bed of *Eliſha*: he calls for bow and arrows, and puts them into the hand of *Joaſh*, and, putting his hands upon the king's hand, he bids to ſhoot eaſtward, and while the ſhaft flies, and lights, he ſays, *The arrow of the Lord's deliverance from* Syria; *for thou ſhalt ſmite the* Syrians *in* Aphek, *till thou have conſumed them.* If the weak and withered hand of the prophet had not been upon the youthful and vigorous hand of the king, this bow had been drawn in vain: the ſtrength was from the hand of the king, the bleſſing from the hand of the prophet. He, whoſe real parable hath made the earth to be *Syria*, the arrow revenge, the archer *Joaſh*, hath obtained for his laſt boon from God to *Iſrael*, that this archer ſhall ſhoot this arrow of revenge into the heart of *Syria*, and wound it to death. When then the hand of the king, and of the prophet, draw together, there cannot chuſe but ſucceſs muſt follow.

How

How readily doth *Eliſha* now make good the words of *Joaſh!* how truly is he the chariots and horſemen of *Iſrael! Iſrael* had not fought without him, much leſs had been victorious; if theirs be the endeavour, the ſucceſs is his. Even the dying prophet puts life and ſpeed into the forces of *Iſrael;* and, while he is digging his own grave, is raiſing trophies to God's people.

He had received kindneſs from the *Syrians;* amongſt them was he harboured in the dearth, and from ſome of their nobles was preſented with rich gifts: but their enmity to *Iſrael* drowns all his private reſpects; he cannot but profeſs hoſtility to the public enemies of the church, neither can he content himſelf with a ſingle prediction of their ruin. He bids *Joaſh* to take the arrows, and ſmite upon the ground; he ſets no number of thoſe ſtrokes, as ſuppoſing the frequence of thoſe blows, which *Joaſh* might well, upon this former parabolical act, underſtand to be ſignificant. The ſlack hand of the king ſmites but thrice. So apt we are to be wanting to ourſelves; ſo coldly do we execute the commands of God. The ſick prophet is not more grieved, than angry at this dull negligence. Doubtleſs, God had revealed to him, for his laſt gratification, that, upon his fervent prayers, ſo often as *Joaſh* ſhould voluntarily, after his general charge, ſmite the earth, ſo oft ſhould *Iſrael* ſmite *Syria*. *Eliſha*'s zeal doth not languiſh with his body; with a fatherly authority he chides him who had ſtyled him father, not fearing to ſpend ſome of his laſt wind in a mild reproof. *Thou ſhouldſt have ſmitten five or ſix times, then thou hadſt ſmitten* Syria *till thou hadſt conſumed it; whereas now thou ſhalt ſmite* Syria *but thrice.* Not that the unchangeable decree of the Almighty meant to ſuſpend

itſelf upon the uncertain iſſue of *Joaſh*'s will; but he, that puts this word into the mouth of his prophet, puts this motion into the hand of the king, which did not more willingly ſtay, than neceſſarily obey the providence whereby it was ſtirred. Even while we have the freeſt choice, we fall upon thoſe actions and circumſtances, whereby the juſt and holy will of our God is brought about. Our very neglects, our ignorances, ſhall fulfil his eternal counſels.

Eliſha dies and is buried; his miracles do not ceaſe with his life. Who can marvel, that his living prayers raiſed the ſon of the *Shunamite*, when his dead bones raiſe the carcaſe that touched them. God will be free in his works; he that muſt die himſelf, yet ſhall revive another: the ſame power might have continued life to him, that gave it by his bones. *Iſrael* ſhall well ſee that he lives, by whoſe virtue *Eliſha* was both in life and death miraculous. While the prophet was alive, the impetration might ſeem to be his, though the power were God's. Now, that he is dead, the bones can challenge nothing, but ſend the wandering *Iſraelites* to that Almighty agent, to whom it is all one to work by the quick or dead. Were not the men of *Iſrael* more dead than the carcaſe thus buried; how could they chuſe but ſee, in this ruined corpſe, an emblem of their own condition? how could they chuſe but think, If we adhere to the God of *Eliſha*, he ſhall raiſe our decayed eſtates, and reſtore our nation to the former glory?

The *Sadducees* had as yet no being in *Iſrael*. With what face could that hereſy ever after look into the world, when, before the birth of it, it was ſo palpably convinced, with an example of the reſurrection? Intermiſſion of time, and degrees of corruption, add nothing to the impoſſibility of our riſing. The body that is once cold in death, hath no more aptitude to a reanimation, than that which is mouldered

dered into duſt; only the divine power of the Maker muſt reſtore either, can reſtore both. When we are dead, and buried in the grave of our ſin, it is only the touch of God's prophets, applying unto us the death and reſurrection of the Son of God, that can put new life into us. No leſs true, though ſpiritual, is the miracle of our riſing up from an eſtate of inward corruption, to a life of grace.

Yet all this prevails not with *Iſrael*. No bones of *Eliſha* could raiſe them from their wicked idolatry; and, notwithſtanding their groſs ſins, *Joaſh* their king proſpers. Whether it were for the ſake of *Jehu*, whoſe grand-child he was, or for the ſake of *Eliſha*, whoſe face he wept upon, his hand is notably ſucceſsful, not only againſt the ſon of *Hazael* king of *Syria*, whom he beats out of the cities of *Iſrael*, but againſt *Amaziah* king of *Judah*, whom he took priſoner, beating down the very walls of *Jeruſalem*, and returning laden with the ſacred and rich ſpoil, both of the temple and court, to his *Samaria*.

O the depth of the divine juſtice and wiſdom, in theſe outward adminiſtrations! The beſt cauſe, the beſt man, doth not ever fare beſt. *Amaziah* did that which was right in the ſight of the Lord, *Joaſh* evil; *Amaziah* follows *David*, though not with equal paces, *Joaſh* follows *Jeroboam*; yet is *Amaziah* ſhamefully foiled by *Joaſh*. Whether God yet meant to viſit, upon this king of *Judah*, the ſtill odious unthankfulneſs of his father *Jehoiada*, or to plague *Judah* for their ſhare in the blood of *Zechariah*, and their late revolt to idolatry; or, whether *Amaziah*'s too much confidence in his own ſtrength, which moved his bold challenge to *Joaſh*, were thought fit to be thus taken down; or whatever other ſecret ground of God's judgment there might be, it is not for our preſumption to inquire. Whoſo by the event ſhall judge of love or hatred, ſhall be ſure to run upon

on that wo, which belongs to them that call good evil, and evil good.

What a ſavage piece of juſtice it is, to put the right, whether of inheritance or honour, to the deciſion of the ſword, when it is no news for the better to miſcarry by the hand of the worſe?

The race is not to the ſwift, the battle is not to the ſtrong, no, not to the good. Perhaps, God will correct his own by a foil; perhaps, he will plague his enemy by a victory. They are only our ſpiritual combats wherein our faithful courage is ſure of a crown.

CONTEM. VI. UZZIAH *leprous.*

EVEN the throne of David paſſed many changes of good and evil. Good *Jehoſaphat* was followed with three ſucceſſions of wicked princes, and thoſe three were again ſucceeded with three others godly and virtuous. *Amaziah* for a long time ſhone fair, but, at the laſt, ſhut up in a cloud: the gods of the *Edomites* marred him. His rebellion againſt God ſtirred up his people's rebellion aginſt him. The ſame hands that ſlew him, crowned his ſon *Uzziah;* ſo as the young king might imagine, it was not their ſpite that drew violence upon his father, but his own wickedneſs. Both early did this prince reign and late: he began at ſixteen, and ſat fifty-two years in the throne of *Judah*. They, that mutinied in the declining age of *Amaziah* the father, are obſequious to the childhood of the ſon, as if they profeſſed to adore ſovereignty, while they hated lewdneſs. The unchanged government of good princes is the happineſs no leſs of the ſubjects, than of themſelves. The hand knows beſt to guide thoſe reins to which it hath been inured; and even mean hackneys go on cheerfully in their wonted road. Cuſtom, as it makes

evils

evils more ſupportable, ſo, where it meets with conſtant minds, makes good things more pleaſing and beneficial.

The wiſe and holy *Zechariah* was an happy tutor to the minority of king *Uzziah*. That veſſel can hardly miſcarry where a ſkilful ſteerſman ſits at the helm. The firſt praiſe of a good prince is to be judicious and juſt, and pious in himſelf: the next is, to give ear and way to them that are ſuch. While *Zechariah* hath the viſions of God, and *Uzziah* takes the counſels of *Zechariah*, it is hard to ſay, whether the prophet, or the king, or the ſtate, be happier.

God will be in no man's debt. So long as *Uzziah* ſought the Lord, *God made him to proſper*. Even what we do out of duty, cannot want a reward. Godlineſs never diſappointed any man's hopes, oft hath exceeded them. If *Uzziah* fight againſt the *Philiſtines*, if againſt the *Arabians*, and *Mehunims* (according to his names) the ſtrength, the help of the Almighty is with him. The *Ammonites* come in with preſents, and all the neighbour nations ring of the greatneſs, of the happineſs of *Uzziah:* his bounty and care makes *Jeruſalem* both ſtrong and proud of her new towers; yea, the very deſert muſt taſte of his munificence.

The outward munificence of princes cannot ſtand firm, unleſs it be built upon the foundations of providence and frugality. *Uzziah* had not been ſo great a king, if he had not been ſo great an huſband; he had his flocks in the deſerts, and his herds in the plains; his ploughs in the fields, his vine-dreſſers upon the mountains, and in *Carmel:* neither was this more out of profit, than delight, for he loved huſbandry. Who can contemn thoſe callings, for meanneſs, which have been the pleaſures of princes?

Hence was *Uzziah* ſo potent at home, ſo dreadful to his neighbours. His wars had better ſinews than

than theirs. Which of his predeceſſors was able to maintain ſo ſettled an army, of more than three hundred and ten thouſand trained ſoldiers, well furniſhed, well fitted for the ſuddeneſt occaſions? Thrift is the ſtrongeſt prop of power.

The greatneſs of *Uzziah*, and the rare devices of his artificial engines for war, have not more raiſed his fame, than his heart: ſo is he ſwollen up with the admiration of his own ſtrength and glory, that he breaks again. How eaſy it is for the beſt man to dote upon himſelf, and to be lifted up ſo high, as to loſe the ſight both of the ground whence he riſes, and of the hand that advanced him! How hard it is for him that hath invented ſtrange engines for the battering his enemies, to find out any means to beat down his own proud thoughts! Wiſe *Solomon* knew what he did, when he prayed to be delivered from too much, *Leſt, ſaid he, I be full and deny thee, and ſay, Who is the Lord?* Upon this rock did the ſon of *Solomon* run and ſplit himſelf. His full ſails of proſperity carried him into preſumption and ruin. What may he not do, what may he not be? Becauſe he found his power otherwiſe unlimited, over-ruling in the court, the cities, the fields, the deſerts, the armies and magazines, therefore he thinks he may do ſo in the temple too. As things royal, civil, husbandry, military, paſſed his hands; ſo why ſhould not, thinks he, ſacred alſo? It is a dangerous indiſcretion for a man not to know the bounds of his own calling. What confuſion doth not follow upon this breaking of the ranks?

Upon a ſolemn day, king *Uzziah* clothes himſelf in pontifical robes, and, in the view of that populous aſſembly, walks up in ſtate into the temple of God, and, boldly approaching to the altar of incenſe, offers to burn ſweet odours upon it to the God of heaven. *Azariah* the prieſt is ſenſible of ſo perilous an

an incroachment, he therefore, attended with four-ſcore valiant aſſiſtants of that holy tribe, haſtens after the king, and finding him with the cenſer in his hand, ready addreſſed to that ſinful devotion, ſtays him with a free and grave expoſtulation. There is no place wherein I could be ſorry to ſee thee, O king, but this where thou art; neither is there any act that we ſhould grudge thee ſo much, as this which is the moſt ſacred. Is it poſſible that ſo great an overſight ſhould fall into ſuch wiſdom? can a religious prince, trained up under an holy *Zechariah*, after ſo many years zealous profeſſion of piety, be either ignorant, or regardleſs of thoſe limits, which God hath ſet to his own ſervices?

O what means this uncouth attempt! Conſider, O dear ſovereign, for God's ſake, for thy ſoul's ſake, conſider where thou art, what thou doſt: it is God's houſe wherein thou ſtand'ſt, not thine own. Look about thee, and ſee, whether theſe vails, theſe tables, theſe pillars, theſe walls, theſe pavements, have any reſemblance of earth. There is no place in all the world, whence thy God hath excluded thee, but only this; this he hath reſerved for his own uſe: and canſt thou think much to allow one room as proper to him, who hath not grudged all the reſt to thee? But if it be thy zeal of a perſonal ſervice to God, that hath carried thee thither, alas! how canſt thou hope to pleaſe the Almighty with a forbidden ſacrifice? which of thine holy progenitors ever dared to tread where thy foot now ſtandeth? which of them ever put forth their hand to touch this ſacred altar? Thou knoweſt that God hath ſet apart, and ſanctified his own attendants. Wherefore ſerves the prieſthood, if this be the right of kings? Were it not for the ſtrict prohibition of our God, it could ſeem no other than an honour to our profeſſion, that a king ſhould think to dignify himſelf by our em-

ployment. But now, knowing the ſevere charge of the great King of heaven, we cannot but tremble to ſee that cenſer in thine hand: who ever, out of the holy tribe, hath wielded it unrevenged? this affront is not to us, it is to the God whom we ſerve. In awe of that terrible Majeſty, as thou wouldſt avoid ſome exemplary judgment, O king, withdraw thyſelf, not without humble deprecations, from this preſence, and lay down that interdicted handful, with fear and trembling. Be thou ever a king, let us be prieſts; the ſceptre is thine, let cenſers be ours.

What religious heart could do other, than relent at ſo faithful and juſt an admonition? but how hard is it for great perſons to yield they have offended? *Uzziah* muſt not be faulty; what is done raſhly, ſhall be born out with power; he was wroth, and thus expreſſeth it, What means this ſaucy expoſtulation, O ye ſons of *Levi!* how dare ye thus malapertly control the well-meant actions of your ſovereign? if ye be prieſts, remember that ye are ſubjects; or if ye will needs forget it, how eaſy is it for this hand to awake your memory? what ſuch offence can it be for me to come into that houſe, and to touch that altar, which my royal progenitors have made, beautified, conſecrated? is the God of this place only yours? why do ye thus ambitiouſly engroſs religion? if princes have not intermeddled with theſe holy affairs, it was becauſe they would not, not becauſe they might not. When thoſe laws were made for the ſanctuary, there were no kings to grace theſe divine ceremonies; yet, even then, *Moſes* was privileged. The perſons of princes, if ye know not, are no leſs ſacred than your own. It is your preſumption to account the Lord's anointed profane. Conteſt with thoſe, whoſe dry and unhallowed heads are ſubject to your power; for me, I will not aſk your leave to be devout. Look ye to your own cenſers, preſume not

not to meddle with mine: in the mean time, can ye think this inſolence of yours ſhall eſcape unrevenged? Can it ſtand with the honour of my ſovereignty, to be thus proudly checked by ſubjects? *God do ſo to me and more alſo, if*—While *Uzziah* yet ſpeaks, God ſtrikes: ere the words of fury can come forth of his mouth, the leproſy appears in his forehead. Leproſy was a moſt loathſome diſeaſe: the forehead is the moſt conſpicuous part. Had this ſhameful ſcurf broken forth upon his hand, or foot, or breaſt, it might have been hid from the eyes of men; now the forehead is ſmitten with this judgment, that God may proclaim to all beholders, Thus ſhall it be done to the man, whoſe arrogance hath thruſt him upon a ſacred charge. Public offences muſt have open ſhame.

It is a dangerous thing to put ourſelves into the affairs, into the preſence of God, unwarranted. There cannot be a more fooliſh miſpriſion, than, becauſe we are great on earth, to think we may be bold with Heaven. When God's meſſengers cannot prevail by counſels, entreaties, threats, it is time for God to ſhew his immediate judgments. Wilful offenders can expect nothing but a fearful revenge.

Now begins *Uzziah* to be confounded in himſelf; and ſhame ſtrives with leproſy, for a place in his forehead: the hand of God hath done that in an inſtant, which all the tongues of men had attempted in vain. There needs no further ſolicitor of his egreſs; the ſenſe of his plague ſends him forth alone. And now he thinks, Wretched man that I am, how have I angered God, and undone myſelf! I would needs come in like a prieſt, and now go forth a leper; the pride of my heart made me think myſelf worthy the preſence of a God; God's juſt diſpleaſure hath now made me unworthy of the preſence of men; while I affected the altar, I have loſt my throne; while I

ſcornfully rejected the advice and cenſures of God's miniſters, I am now become a ſpectacle of horror and deformity to my own ſervants; I, that would be ſending up perfumes to heaven, have made my naſtineſs hateful to my own ſenſes. What do I under this ſacred roof! neither is God's houſe now for me, nor mine own: what cell, what dungeon is cloſe enough for me, wherein to wear out the reſidue of mine unhappy and uncomfortable days! O God, thou art juſt, and I am miſerable!

Thus, with a dejected countenance, and ſad heart, doth *Uzziah* haſten to retire himſelf; and wiſhes that he could be no leſs hid from himſelf, than from others. How eaſy is it for the God of heaven to bring down the higheſt pitch of earthly greatneſs, and to humble the ſtubborneſt pride!

Upon the leiſure of ſecond thoughts, *Uzziah* cannot but acknowledge much favour in this correction, and confeſs to have eſcaped well; others he knew had been ſtruck dead, or ſwallowed up quick, for ſo preſumptuous an intruſion. It is happy for him, if his forehead may excuſe his ſoul.

Uzziah ceaſed not to be a king, when he began to be a leper; the diſeaſe of his forehead did not remove his crown: his ſon *Jotham* reigned for him, under him; and while he was not ſeen, yet he was obeyed. The character of ſovereignty is indelible, whether by bodily infirmity, or by ſpiritual cenſure. Neither is it otherways, O God, betwixt thee and us; if we be once a royal generation unto thee, our leproſies may deform us, they ſhall not dethrone us; ſtill ſhall we have the right, ſtill the poſſeſſion of that glorious kingdom, wherein we are inveſted from eternity.

CONTEM. VII. AHAZ *with his new altar.*

AFTER many unhappy changes of the two thrones, *Ahaz* ſucceeds *Jotham* in the kingdom of *Judah:* an ill ſon of a good father; not more the heir of *David*'s ſeat, than of *Jeroboam*'s ſin. Though *Iſrael* play the harlot, yet who can abide that *Judah* ſhould ſin! It is hard not to be infected with a contagious neighbourhood: whoever read, that the kingdom of *Iſrael* was ſeaſoned with the vicinity of the true religion of *Judah?* Goodneſs, ſuch our nature is, is not ſo apt to ſpread. A tainted air doth more eaſily affect a ſound body, than a wholeſome air can clear the ſick. Superſtition hath ever been more ſucceſsful than truth; the young years of *Ahaz* are ſoon miſled to a plauſible miſdevotion.

A man that is once fallen from truth, knows not where he ſhall ſtay. From the calves of *Jeroboam* is *Ahaz* drawn to the gods of the Heathen; yea, now bulls and goats are too little for thoſe new deities; his own fleſh and blood is but dear enough; *He made his ſon to paſs through their fire.* Where do we find any religious *Iſraelite* thus zealous for God? Neither doth the holineſs and mercy of our God require ſo cruel a ſacrifice: neither is our dull and niggardly hand ready to gratify him with more eaſy obediences. O God, how gladly ſhould we offer unto thee our ſouls and bodies, which we may enjoy ſo much the more, when they are thine; ſince zealous Pagans ſtick not to loſe their own fleſh and blood in an idol's fire!

He, that hath thus ſhamefully caſt off the God of his fathers, cannot be long without a fearful revenge. The king of *Iſrael* galls him on the one ſide, the king of *Syria* on the other. To avoid the ſhock of both, *Ahaz* doth not betake himſelf to the God whom he had offended, who was able to make his enemies at peace with

with him, but to *Tiglath-pileſer* king of *Aſhur*; him doth he woo with ſuits, with gifts, and robs God of thoſe preſents, which may endear ſo ſtrong an helper. He, that thought not his ſon too dear for an idol, thinks not God's ſilver and gold too dear for an idolatrous abettor.

O the infinite patience of the Almighty! God gives ſucceſs a while to ſo offenſive a rivality. This *Aſſyrian* king prevails againſt the king of *Syria*, kills him, and takes his chief city *Damaſcus*. The quarrel of the king of *Judah* hath enlarged the territories of his aſſiſtant beyond hope; and now, while this *Aſſyrian* victor is enjoying the poſſeſſion of his new-won *Damaſcus*, *Ahaz* goes up thither to meet him, to congratulate the victory, to add unto thoſe triumphs, which were drawn on by his ſolicitation. There he ſees a new-faſhioned altar, that pleaſes his eye; that old form of *Solomon*'s, which was made by the pattern ſhowed to *Moſes* in the mount, is now grown ſtale and deſpicable: a model of this more exquiſite frame is ſent to *Urijah* the prieſt, and muſt be ſampled in *Jeruſalem*.

It is a dangerous preſumption to make innovations, if but in the circumſtances of God's worſhip. Thoſe human additions, which would ſeem to grace the inſtitution of God, deprave it; that infinite Wiſdom knows beſt what will pleaſe itſelf, and preſcribes accordingly. The fooliſhneſs of God is wiſer than the wiſdom of men. Idolatry and falſhood are commonly more gaudy and plauſible than truth. That heart, which can, for the outward homelineſs, deſpiſe the ordinances of God, is already aliened from true religion, and lies open to the groſſeſt ſuperſtition.

Never any prince was ſo foully idolatrous, as that he wanted a prieſt to ſecond him. An *Urijah* is fit to humour an *Ahaz*. Greatneſs could never command

mand any thing, which ſome ſervile wits were not ready both to applaud and juſtify.

Ere the king can be returned from *Damaſcus*, the altar is finiſhed. It were happy, if true godlineſs could be ſo forward in the proſecutions of good. Neither is this ſtrange pile reared only, but thruſt up betwixt God's altar and the temple, in an apparent precedency, as if he had ſaid, Let the God of *Judah* come behind the deities of *Syria*.

And now, to make up the full meaſure of his impiety, this idolatrous king will himſelf be ſacrificing upon his new altar, to his new gods, the gods of *Damaſcus*. An uſurped prieſthood well becomes a falſe deity; *Becauſe, ſaith he, the gods of the kings of* Syria *help them, therefore will I ſacrifice to them, that they may help me.*

O blind ſuperſtition! How did the gods of *Syria* help their kings, when both thoſe kings and their gods were vanquiſhed, and taken by the king of *Aſſyria?* Even this *Damaſcus* and this altar were the ſpoil of a foreign enemy; how then did the gods of *Syria* help their kings, any other than to their ruin? What dotage is this to make choice of a foiled protection? But had the *Syrians* proſpered, muſt their gods have the thanks? Are there no authors of good but blocks or devils? or is an outward proſperity the only argument of truth, the only motive of devotion? O fooliſh *Ahaz!* it is the God thou haſt forſaken that plagues thee, under whoſe only arm thou mightſt have prevailed. His power beats thoſe Pagan ſtocks one againſt another, ſo as, one while, one ſeems victorious, another vanquiſhed; and at laſt he counfounds both, together with their proudeſt clients. Thyſelf ſhall be the beſt inſtance.

Of all the kings of *Judah* hitherto, there is none ſo dreadful an example, either of ſin or judgment, as this ſon of good *Jotham*. I abhor to think, that ſuch a mon-

a monſter ſhould deſcend from the loins of *David*; where ſhould be the period of this wickedneſs? He began with the high places, thence he deſcends to the calves of *Dan* and *Bethel*; from thence he falls to a *Syrian* altar, to the *Syrian* god; then, from a partnerſhip, he falls to an utter excluſion of the true God, and blocking up his temple, and then to the ſacrifice of his own ſon; and at laſt, as if hell were broken looſe upon God's inheritance, every ſeveral city, every high place of *Judah* hath a new God. No marvel, if he be branded by the Spirit of God, with, *This is that king* Ahaz.

What a fearful plague did this noiſome deluge of ſin leave behind it in the land of *Judah?* Who can expreſs the horror of God's revenge upon a people that ſhould have been his? *Pekah* the king of *Iſrael* ſlew an hundred and twenty thouſand of them in one day, amongſt whom was *Maaſeiah* the ſon of *Ahaz*. O juſt judgment of the Almighty! *Ahaz* ſheds the blood of one ſon to an idol: the true God ſheds the blood of another of his ſons in revenge.

Yet the hand of the Lord is ſtretched out ſtill.

Two hundred thouſand of them were carried away, by the *Iſraelites*, captive to *Samaria*.

The *Edomites* came, and carried away another part of them for bond-ſlaves to their country.

The *Philiſtines* came up and ſhared the cities of the ſouth of *Judah*, and the villages thereof: ſhortly, what other is miſerable *Judah*, than the prey and ſpoil of all the neighbouring nations? *For the Lord brought* Judah *low becauſe of* Iſrael, *for he made* Judah *naked, and tranſgreſſed ſore againſt the Lord*. As for the great king of *Aſſhur*, whom *Ahaz* purchaſed with the ſacrilegious pillage of the houſe of God, inſtead of an aid, he proves a burden: however he ſped in his firſt onſets, now, *he diſtreſſed* Judah, *but ſtrengthened it not*. The charge

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was as great, as the benefit ſmall; ſooner ſhall he eat them out, than reſcue them. No arm of fleſh can ſhelter *Ahaz* from a vengeance.

Be wiſe, O ye kings; be inſtructed, O ye judges of the earth: ſerve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiſs the ſon, leſt he be angry, and ye periſh from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.

His ſubjects complain, that he died ſo late; and, as repenting that he ever was, deny him a room in the ſepulchres of kings; as if they had ſaid, the common earth of *Jeruſalem* is too good for him that degenerated from his progenitors, ſpoiled his kingdom, deprived his people, forſook his God.

CONTEM. VIII. *The utter deſtruction of the kingdom of* ISRAEL.

JUDAH was at a ſore heave; yet *Iſrael* ſhall miſcarry before it; ſuch are the ſins of both, that they ſtrive whether ſhall fall firſt: but this lot muſt light upon the Ten tribes. Though the late king of *Judah* were perſonally worſe than the moſt of *Jeroboam*'s ſucceſſors, yet the people were generally leſs evil, upon whom the encroachments of idolatry were more by obtruſion, than by conſent; beſides, that the thrones of *Judah* had ſome interchanges of good princes, *Iſrael* none at all. The ſame juſtice therefore that made *Iſrael* a ſcourge to *Judah*, made *Aſſyria* a ſcorpion to *Iſrael*.

It was the quarrel of *Judah*, that firſt engaged the king of *Aſhur* in this war againſt *Iſrael*: now he is not ſo eaſily fetcht off. So we have ſeen ſome eager maſtiff, that hath been ſet on by the leaſt clap of the hand, but could not be looſened by the force of ſtaves.

Salmaneſer king of *Aſſyria* comes up againſt *Hoſhea* king of *Iſrael*, and ſubdues him, and puts him to his tribute. This yoke was uncouth and unpleaſing: the vanquiſhed prince was neither able to reſiſt, nor willing to yield: ſecretly therefore he treats with the king of *Egypt* for aſſiſtance, as deſiring rather to hazard his liberty by the hand of an equal, than to enjoy a quiet ſubjection under the hand of an over-ruling power. We cannot blame princes to be jealous of their ſovereignties: the detaining of his yearly tribute, and the whiſperings with new confederates, have drawn up the king of *Aſhur* to perfect his own victories. He returns therefore with a ſtrong power, and, after three years ſiege, takes *Samaria*, impriſons *Hoſhea*, and, in the exchange of a woful captivity, he peoples *Iſrael* with *Aſſyrians*, and *Aſſyria* with *Iſraelites*. Now that abuſed ſoil hath, upon a ſurfeit of wickedneſs, caſt out her perfidious owners, and will try how it can fare with heatheniſh ſtrangers. Now, the *Aſſyrian* gallants triumph in the palaces of *Samaria* and *Jezreel*, while the peers and captains of *Iſrael* are driven manacled through the *Aſſyrian* ſtreets, and billeted to the ſeveral places of their perpetual ſervitude. Shortly now the flouriſhing kingdom of the Ten tribes is come to a final and ſhameful end, and ſo vaniſhed in this laſt diſſipation, that, ſince that day, no man could ever ſay, this was *Iſrael*.

O terrible example of vengeance, upon that peculiar people, whom God hath choſen for himſelf out of all the world! All the world were witneſſes of the favours of their miraculous deliverances and protections; all the world ſhall be witneſſes of their juſt confuſion.

It is not in the power of ſlight errors to ſet off that infinite mercy. What was it, O God, what was it that cauſed thee to caſt off thine own inheritance? what

what but the ſame that made thee to caſt the angels out of heaven, even their rebellious ſins! Thoſe ſins dared to emulate the greatneſs of thy mercies, no leſs than they forced the ſeverity of thy judgments: *They left all the commandments of the Lord their God; and made them molten images, even two calves; and made a grove, and worſhipped all the hoſt of heaven, and ſerved* Baal, *and cauſed their ſons and daughters to paſs through the fire, and uſed divination and enchantments, and ſold themſelves to do evil in the ſight of the Lord to provoke him to anger.*

Neither were theſe ſlips of frailty, or ignorant miſtakings, but wilful crimes, obſtinate impieties, in ſpite of the doctrines, reproofs, menaces, miraculous convictions of the holy prophets, which God ſent amongſt them. Thy deſtruction is of thyſelf, O *Iſrael!* What could the juſt hand of the Almighty do leſs than conſume a nation ſo incorrigibly flagitious? a nation ſo unthankful for mercies, ſo impatient of remedies, ſo incapable of repentance; ſo obliged, ſo warned, ſo ſhameleſsly, ſo lawleſsly wicked?

What nation under heaven can now challenge an indefeaſible intereſt in God, when *Iſrael* itſelf is caſt off? what church in the world can ſhow ſuch dear love-tokens from the Almighty, as this now abhorred and adulterous ſpouſe? He, that ſpared not the natural olive, ſhall he ſpare the wild? It is not for us ſinners of the Gentiles to be high-minded, but awful.

The *Iſraelites* are carried captive to *Aſſyria*. Theſe goodly cities of the Ten tribes may not ly waſte and unpeopled: the wiſdom of the victor finds it fit to tranſplant his own colonies thither, that ſo he may raiſe profit thence, with ſecurity. From *Babylon* therefore, and *Cuthah*, and *Ava*, and *Hamath*, and *Sepharvaim*, doth he ſend of his own ſubjects, to

poſſeſs and inhabit the cities of *Samaria*. The land doth not bruik her new tenants: *They feared not the Lord;* how ſhould they? they knew him not. *Therefore the Lord ſent lions amonſt them, which ſlew ſome of them.* Not the verieſt Pagan can be excuſed for his ignorance of God: even the depravedeſt nature might teach us to tremble at a Deity. It is juſt with the Almighty not to put up with neglect, where he hath beſtowed reaſon.

The brute creatures are ſent to revenge the quarrel of their Maker, upon worſe beaſts than themſelves. Still hath God left himſelf champions in *Iſrael:* lions tear the *Aſſyrians* in pieces, and put them in mind, that, had it not been for wickedneſs, that land needed not to have changed maſters. The great Lord of the world cannot want means to plague offenders: if the men be gone, yet the beaſts are there; and if the beaſts had been gone, yet, ſo long as there were ſtones in the walls, in the quarries, God would be ſure of avengers. There is no ſecurity but in being at peace with God.

The king of *Aſſyria* is ſued to for remedy. Even theſe Pagans have learned to know that theſe lions were ſent from a God; that this puniſhment is for ſin: *They know not the manner of the God of the land, therefore he hath ſent lions among them.* Theſe blind Heathens, that think every land hath a ſeveral god, yet hold that god worthy of his own worſhip; yet hold, that worſhip muſt be grounded upon knowledge, the want of that knowledge puniſhable, the puniſhment of that want juſt and divine. How much worſe than *Aſſyrians* are they that are ready to aſcribe all calamities to nature, to chance? that, acknowledging but one God of all the world, are yet careleſs to know him, to ſerve him?

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One of the prieſts of *Iſrael* is appointed to be carried back to *Samaria*, to teach the *Aſſyrian* colony the faſhions of the god of the land; not for devotion, but for impunity. Vain politicians think to ſatisfy God by patching up religions: any forms are good enough for an unknown deity. The *Aſſyrian* prieſts teach, and practiſe the worſhip of their own gods. The *Iſraelitiſh* prieſt preſcribes the worſhip of the true God. The people will follow both; the one out of liking, the other out of fear. What a prodigious mixture was here of religions? true with falſe, *Jewiſh* with paganiſh, divine with deviliſh; every diviſion of theſe tranſplanted *Aſſyrians* had their ſeveral deities, high places, ſacrifices; this high prieſt of *Iſrael* intercommunes with every of them: ſo that now theſe fathers of *Samaritaniſm* are in at all; *They fear the Lord, and ſerve their idols.* No beggar's cloak is more pieced than the religion of theſe new inhabitants of *Iſrael.* I know not how their bodies ſped for the lions; I am ſure their ſouls fared the worſe for this medely. Above all things, God hates a mongrel devotion; if we be not all *Iſrael*, it were better to be all *Aſſur*: it cannot ſo much diſpleaſe God to be unknown or neglected, as to be conſorted with idols.

CONTEM. IX. HEZEKIAH *and* SENACHERIB.

ISRAEL is gone, *Judah* is left ſtanding; or rather ſome few ſprigs of thoſe two tribes: ſo we have ſeen, in the ſhredding of ſome large timber-tree, one or two boughs left at the top to hold up the ſap. Who can but lament the poor remainders of that languiſhing kingdom of *David!*

Take out of the two tribes of *Judah* and *Benjamin* one hundred and twenty thouſand, whom *Pekah* the king of *Iſrael* ſlew in one day; take out two hundred thou-

thouſand that were carried away captive to *Samaria*; take out thoſe that were tranſported into the bondage of the *Edomites*, and thoſe that were ſubdued in the ſouth parts by the *Philiſtines*: alas, what an handful was left to the king of *Judah*; ſcarce worth the name of a dominion! yet, even now, out of the gleeds of *Judah*, doth God raiſe up a glorious light to his forlorn church; yea, from the wretched loins of *Ahaz*, doth God fetch an holy *Hezekiah*. It had been hard to conceive the ſtate of *Judah* worſe than it was; neither was it more miſerable than ſinful, and, in regard of both, deſperate; when, beyond hope, God revives this dying ſtock of *David*, and, out of very ruins, builds up his own houſe. *Ahaz* was not more the ill ſon of a good father, than he was the ill father of a good ſon. He was the ill ſon of good *Jotham*, the ill father of good *Hezekiah*; good *Hezekiah* makes amends for his father's impiety, and puts a new life into the heartleſs remnant of God's people.

The wiſdom of our good God knows when his aid will be moſt ſeaſonable, moſt welcome, which he then loves to give, when he finds us left of all our hopes. That merciful hand is reſerved for a dead lift; then, he fails us not.

Now, ye might have ſeen this pious prince buſily beſtirring himſelf, in ſo late and needful a reformation, removing the high places, battering and burning the idols, demoliſhing their temples, cutting down their groves, opening the temple, purging the altars and veſſels, ſanctifying the prieſts, rekindling the lamps, renewing the incenſe, reinſtituting the ſacrifices, eſtabliſhing the order of God's ſervice, appointing the courſes, ſettling the maintenance of the miniſters, publiſhing the decrees of the long neglected paſſover, celebrating it, and the other feaſts, with due ſolemnity, encouraging the people, contributing bountifully to the offerings; and, in one word, ſo ordering

dering all the affairs of God, as if he had been ſent down from heaven to reſtore religion, as if *David* himſelf had been alive again in this bleſſed heir, not ſo much of his crown, as of his piety. O *Judah!* happy in thy *Hezekiah;* O *Hezekiah!* happy in the gracious reſtoration of thy *Judah.* *Ahaz* ſhall have no thank for ſuch a ſon: the God, that is able of the very ſtones to raiſe children to *Abraham,* raiſes a true ſeed of *David,* out of the corrupt loins of an idolater. That infinite mercy is not tied to the terms of an immediate propagation: for the ſpace of three hundred years, the man after God's own heart had no perfect heir till now. Till now did the high places ſtand: the devotions of the beſt princes of *Judah* were blemiſhed with ſome weak omiſſions. Now, the zeal of good *Hezekiah* clears all thoſe defects, and works an entire change.

How ſeaſonably hath the providence of God kept the beſt man for the worſt times! When God hath a great work to do, he knows to fit himſelf with inſtruments.

No marvel, if the paganiſh idols go to wreck, when even the brazen ſerpent, that *Moſes* had made by God's own appointment, is broken in pieces. The *Iſraelites* were ſtung with fiery ſerpents; this brazen ſerpent healed them, which they did no ſooner ſee than they recovered. But now, ſuch was the venom of the *Iſraelitiſh* idolatry, that this ſerpent of braſs ſtung worſe than the fiery; that which firſt cured by the eye, now by the eye poiſoned the ſoul; that which was at firſt the type of a Saviour, is now the deadly engine of the enemy: while it helped, it ſtood; it ſtood while it hurt not: but when once wicked abuſe hath turned it into an idol, what was it but *Nehuſhtan?*

The holineſs of the firſt inſtitution, cannot privilege ought from the danger of a future profanation; nor,

nor, as the caſe may ſtand, from an utter abolition. What antiquity, what authority, what primary ſervice might this ſerpent have pleaded? all that cannot keep it out of the duſt. Thoſe things which are neceſſary in their being, beneficial in their continuance, may ſtill remain when their abuſe is purged: but thoſe things whoſe uſe is but temporary, and whoſe duration is needleſs and unprofitable, may ceaſe with the occaſion, and much more periſh with an inſeparable abuſe. *Hezekiah* willingly forgets who made the ſerpent, when he ſees the *Iſraelites* make it an idol. It is no leſs intolerable for God to have a rival of his own making.

Since *Hezekiah* was thus, above all his anceſtors, upright with the Lord, it is no marvel, if the Lord were with him, if he proſpered whitherſoever he went; the ſame God, that would have his juſtice magnified in the confuſion of the wicked princes of *Iſrael* and *Judah*, would have his mercy no leſs acknowledged, in the bleſſings of faithful *Hezekiah*.

The great king of *Aſſyria* had, in a ſort, ſwallowed up both the kingdoms of *Judah* and *Iſrael*, yet not with an equal cruelty; he made *Iſrael* captive, *Judah*, upon a willing compoſition, tributary. *Iſrael* is vaniſhed in a tranſportation; *Judah* continues under the homage wherein *Ahaz* left it. *Hezekiah* had reigned but ſix years, when he ſaw his neighbours of *Iſrael* packing into a miſerable captivity, and the proud *Aſſyrians* lording in their cities; yet, even then, when he ſtood alone, in a corner of *Judah*, durſt *Hezekiah* draw his neck out of the yoke of the great and victorious monarch of *Aſſyria*; and, as if one enemy had not been enough, at the ſame time he falls upon the encroaching *Philiſtines*, and prevails. It is not to be aſked, what powers a man can make, but in what terms he ſtands with heaven. The unworthy father of *Hezekiah* had clogged *Judah* with

with this ſervile fealty to the *Aſſyrian;* what the conditions of that ſubjection were, it is too late, and needleſs for us to inquire. If this payment were limited to a period of time, the expiration acquitted him; if, upon covenants of aid, the ceſſation thereof acquitted him; if the reforming of religion, and baniſhment of idolatry, ran under the cenſure of rebellion, the quarrel on *Hezekiah*'s part was holy, on *Senacherib*'s unjuſt: but if the reſtipulation were abſolute, and the withdrawing of this homage upon none but civil grounds, I cannot excuſe the good king from a juſt offence. It was an human frailty in an obliged prince, by force, to effect a free and independent ſovereignty.

What, do we mince that fact, which holy *Hezekiah* himſelf cenſures? *I have offended, return from me; what thou putteſt on me will I bear.* The comfort of liberty may not be had with an unwarranted violence. Holineſs cannot free us from infirmity. It was a weakneſs to do that act, which muſt be ſoon undone with much repentance, and more loſs; this revolt ſhall coſt *Hezekiah*, beſides much humiliation, three hundred yearly talents of ſilver, thirty talents of gold. How much better had it been for the cities of *Judah* to have purchaſed their peace with an eaſy tribute, than war with intolerable taxation?

Fourteen years had good *Hezekiah* fed upon a ſweet peace, ſauced only with a ſet penſion; now he muſt prepare his palate for the bitter morſels of war. The king of *Aſſyria* is come up againſt all the defenced cities of *Judah*, and hath taken them. *Hezekiah* is fain to buy him out with too many talents; the poor kingdom of *Judah* is exhauſted with ſo deep a payment, in ſo much as the king is forced to borrow of God himſelf, for *Hezekiah gave him all the ſilver that was found in the houſe of the Lord; yea, at that time did* Hezekiah *cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the pillars*

which he had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Aſſyria. How hard was good *Hezekiah* driven, ere he would be thus bold with his God! Surely if the mines or coffers of *Judah* could have yielded any ſupply, this ſhift had been hateful; to fetch back for an enemy that which he had given to his Maker. Only neceſſity excuſes that from ſacrilege in the ſon, which will made ſacrilege in the father: that which is once devoted to a ſacred uſe, may not be called back to a prófane. But he, whoſe the earth is, and the fulneſs of it, is not ſo taken with our metals, that he ſhould more regard our gold than our welfare: his goodneſs cannot grudge any outward thing for the price of our peace. To rob God, out of covetouſneſs, or wantonneſs, or neglect, is juſtly damnable; we cannot rob him out of our need; for then he gives us all we take, and bids us ranſom our lives, our liberties; the treaſures of God's houſe were precious, for his ſake, to whom they were conſecrated; but more precious in the ſight of the Lord was the life of any one of his ſaints.

Every true *Iſraelite* was the ſpiritual houſe of God; why ſhould not the door of the material temple be willingly ſtripped, to ſave the whole frame of the ſpiritual temple? Take therefore, O *Hezekiah*, what thou haſt given; no gold is too holy to redeem thy vexation. It matters not ſo much how bare the doors of the temple be, in a caſe of neceſſity, as how well the inſides be furniſhed with ſincere devotion. O the cruel hard-heartedneſs of thoſe men, which will rather ſuffer the living temples of God to be ruined, than they will ranſom their life with farthings.

It could not be, but that the ſtore of needy *Judah* muſt ſoon be drawn dry with ſo deep an exaction; that ſum cannot be ſent, becauſe it cannot be raiſed. The cruel tyrant calls for his bricks, while he allows no ſtraw: his anger is kindled, becauſe *Hezekiah*'s coffers

fers have a bottom; with a mighty hoſt doth he come up againſt *Jeruſalem*, therefore ſhall that city be deſtroyed by him, becauſe by him it hath been impoveriſhed; the inhabitants muſt be ſlaves, becauſe they are beggars.

O lamentable, and, in ſight, deſperate condition of diſtreſſed *Jeruſalem:* wealth it had none; ſtrength it had but a little; all the country round about was ſubdued to the *Aſſyrian;* that proud victor hath begirt the walls of it with an innumerable army, ſcorning that ſuch a ſhovel full of earth ſhould ſtand out but one day. Poor *Jeruſalem* ſtands alone, blocked up with a world of enemies, helpleſs, friendleſs, comfortleſs, looking for the worſt of an hoſtile fury, when *Tartan* and *Rabſaris*, and *Rabſhakeh*, the great captains of the *Aſſyrians* call to a parley; *Hezekiah* ſends to them three of his prime officers, his ſteward, his ſecretary, his recorder. Lord, what inſolent blaſphemies doth that foul mouth of *Rabſhakeh* belch out againſt the living God, againſt his anointed ſervant!

How plauſibly doth he diſcourage the ſubjects of *Hezekiah!* how proudly doth he inſult upon their impotency! how doth he brave them with baſe offers of advantage; and, laſtly, how cunningly doth he forelay their confidence, which was only left them, in the Almighty, proteſting not to be come up thither without the Lord! *The Lord ſaid to me, Go up to this land, and deſtroy it.* How fearful a word was this! the reſt were but vain cracks; this was a thunderbolt to ſtrike dead the heart of *Hezekiah:* if *Rabſhakeh* could have been believed, *Jeruſalem* could not but have flown open; how could it think to ſtand out no leſs againſt God than men? Even thus doth the great enemy of mankind; if he can diſhearten the ſoul from a dependence upon the God of mercies,

the day is his. Lewd miſcreants care not how they belie God, for their own purpoſes.

Eliakim the ſteward of *Hezekiah* well knew, how much the people muſt needs be affected with this pernicious ſuggeſtion; and fain would, therefore, if not ſtop that wicked mouth, yet divert theſe blaſphemies into a foreign expreſſion. I wonder that any wiſe man ſhould look for favour from an enemy: *Speak, I pray thee, to thy ſervants in the* Syrian *language.* What was this, but to teach an adverſary how to do miſchief? Wherefore came *Rabſhakeh* thither, but to gall *Hezekiah*, to withdraw his ſubjects? That tongue is propereſt for him which may hurt moſt. Deprecations of evil to a malicious man are no better than advices. An unknown idiom is fit to keep counſel; they are familiar words that muſt convey ought to the underſtanding. Lewd men are the worſe for admonitions.

Rabſhakeh had not ſo ſtrained his throat, to corrupt the citizens of *Jeruſalem*, had it not been for the humble obteſtation of *Eliakim*. Now he rears up his voice, and holds his ſides, and roars out his double blaſphemies; one while affrighting the people with the great power of the mighty king of *Aſſyria*, another while debaſing the contemptible force of *Hezekiah;* now ſmoothly alluring them with the aſſurances of a ſafe and ſucceſsful yieldance, then diſcouraging them with the impoſſibility of their deliverance; laying before them the fearful examples of greater nations vanquiſhed by that ſword, which was now ſhaken over them, triumphing in the impotency and miſcarriage of their gods. *Who are they, among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the Lord ſhould deliver* Jeruſalem *out of mine hand? where are the gods of* Arpad, *and of* Hamath? Where? but in that helliſh darkneſs, that is ordained both for them and for thee, barbarous

barbarous *Aſſyrian*, that dareſt thus open thy mouth againſt thy Maker: and can thoſe atheous eyes of thine ſee no difference of gods? Is there no diſtance betwixt a ſtock, or ſtone, and that infinite Deity that made heaven and earth? It is enough that thou now feeleſt it; thy torments have taught thee too late, that thou affronteſt a living God.

How did the fingers and tongues of thoſe *Jewiſh* peers and people itch to be at *Rabſhakeh*, in a revengeful anſwer to thoſe impieties: all is huſht, not a word ſounds from thoſe walls. I do not more wonder at *Hezekiah*'s wiſdom, in commanding ſilence, than at the ſubjects obedience in keeping it. This railer could not be more ſpited, than with no anſwer; and if he might be exaſperated, he could not be reformed; beſides, the rebounding of thoſe multiplied blaſphemies might leave ſome ill impreſſions in the multitude; this ſulphurous flaſh, therefore, dies in its own ſmoke, only leaving an hateful ſtench behind it.

Good *Hezekiah* cannot eaſily paſs over this deviliſh oratory; no ſooner doth he hear of it, than he rends his clothes, and covers himſelf with ſackcloth, and betakes himſelf to the houſe of the Lord, and ſends his officers, and the graveſt of the prieſts, clad in ſackcloth, to *Iſaiah* the prophet of God, with a doleful and querelous meſſage.

O the noble piety of *Hezekiah*! Notwithſtanding all the ſtraits of the ſiege, and the danger of ſo powerful an enemy, I find not the garments of this good king, any otherways than whole, and unchanged; but now, ſo ſoon as ever a blaſphemy is uttered againſt the majeſty of his God, though by a Pagan dog, his clothes are torn, and turned into ſackcloth. There can be no better argument of an upright heart, than to be more ſenſible of the indignities offered to God, than of our own dangers. Even theſe deſperate reproaches

ſend

ſend *Hezekiah* to the temple. The more we ſee God's name profaned, the more ſhall we, if we be truly religious, love and honour it.

Whither ſhould *Hezekiah* run, but to the temple, to the prophet? there, there is the refuge of all faithful ones, where they may ſpeak with God, where they may be ſpoken to from God, and fetch comfort from both. It is not poſſible that a believing heart ſhould be diſappointed. *Iſaiah* ſends that meſſage to the good king, that may dry up his tears, and cheer his countenance, and change his ſuit: *Thus ſaith the Lord, Be not afraid of the words which thou haſt heard, with which the ſervants of the king of* Aſſyria *have blaſphemed me: behold, I will ſend a blaſt upon him, and he ſhall hear a rumour, and ſhall return to his own land; and I will cauſe him to fall by the ſword, in his own land.*

Lo, even while *Senacherib* was in the height of his jollity and aſſurance, God's prophet foreſees his ruin, and gives him for dead, while that tyrant thought of nothing but life and victory. Proud and ſecure worldlings little dream of the near approach of their judgments: while they are plotting their deepeſt deſigns, the over-ruling juſtice of the Almighty hath contrived their ſudden confuſion, and ſees, and ſets them their day.

Rabſhakeh returns, and, finding the king of *Aſſyria* warring againſt *Libnah*, reports to him the ſilent, and therein contemptuous anſwer, and firm reſolutions of *Hezekiah:* in the mean time God pulls *Senacherib* by the ear, with the news of the approaching army of *Tirhakah* king of *Ethiopia*, which was coming up to raiſe the ſiege, and to ſuccour his confederates. That dreadful power will not allow the *Aſſyrian* king, in perſon, to lead his other forces up againſt *Jeruſalem*, nor to continue his former leaguer long before thoſe walls. But now, he writes big words to *Hezekiah*,

Hezekiah, and thinks, with his thundering menaces, to beat open the gates, and level the bulwarks of *Jeruſalem*. Like the true maſter of *Rabſhakeh*, he reviles the God of heaven, and baſely parallels him with the dunghill deities of the Heathen.

Good *Hezekiah* gets him into his ſanctuary, there he ſpreads the letter before the Lord; and calls to the God that dwells between the cherubims, to revenge the blaſphemies of *Senacherib*, to protect and reſcue himſelf, and his people. Every one of thoſe words pierced heaven, which was no leſs open to mercy unto *Hezekiah*, than vengeance to *Senacherib*. Now is *Iſaiah* addreſſed with a ſecond meſſage of comfort to him, who doubtleſs diſtruſted not the firſt: only, the reiteration of that furious blaſphemy made him take faſter hold, by his faithful devotion. Now, the jealous God, in a diſdain of ſo blaſphemous a conteſtation, riſes up in a ſtyle of majeſty, and glorioufly tramples upon this ſaucy inſolency; *Becauſe thy rage againſt me, and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore I will put my hook into thy noſe, and my bridle into thy lips, and will turn thee back by the way thou cameſt.* Lo, *Senacherib*, the God of heaven makes a beaſt of thee, who haſt ſo brutiſhly ſpurned at his name! If thou be a ravenous bear, he hath an hook for thy noſtrils: if thou be a reſty horſe, he hath a bridle for thy mouth; in ſpite of thee, thou ſhalt follow his hook, or his bridle, and ſhalt be led to thy juſt ſhame by either.

It is not for us to be the lords of our own actions: *Thus ſaith the Lord concerning the king of* Aſſyria, *he ſhall not come into this city, nor ſhoot an arrow there, nor come before it with ſhield, nor caſt a bank againſt it; by the way that he came, ſhall he return*, &c. Impotent men, what are we in the hands of the Almighty! we purpoſe, he over-rules; we talk of great matters, and think to do wonders,

wonders, he blows upon our projects, and they vaniſh with ourſelves. He that hath ſet bounds to the ſea, hath appointed limits to the rage of the proudeſt enemies; yea, even the devils themſelves are confined. Why boaſt ye yourſelves, O ye tyrants, that ye can do miſchief! ye are ſtinted, and even within thoſe liſts is confuſion.

O the trophies of divine juſtice! *That very night the angel of the Lord went out, and ſmote in the camp of the* Aſſyrians, *an hundred fourſcore and five thouſand, and when they roſe early in the morning, behold they were all dead corpſes.*

How ſpeedy an execution was this! how miraculous! no human arm ſhall have the glory of this victory! It was God that was defied by that preſumptuous *Aſſyrian;* it is God that ſhall right his own wrongs. Had the *Egyptian,* or *Ethiopian* forces been come up, though the ſame God had done this work by them, yet ſome praiſe of this ſlaughter had, perhaps, cleaved to their fingers: now an inviſible hand ſheds all this blood, that his very enemies may clear him from all partnerſhip of revenge. Go now, wicked *Senacherib,* and tell of the gods of *Hamath,* and *Arpad,* and *Sepharvaim,* and *Hena,* and *Ivah,* which thou haſt deſtroyed, and ſay, that *Hezekiah*'s God is but as one of theſe. Go, and add this deity to the number of thy conqueſts: now, ſay that *Hezekiah*'s God, in whom he truſted, hath deceived him, and graced thy triumphs.

With ſhame and grief enough, is that ſheeped tyrant returned to his *Nineveh,* having left behind him all the pride and ſtrength of *Aſſyria,* for compoſt to *Jewiſh* fields. Well were it for thee, O *Senacherib,* if thou couldſt eſcape thus; vengeance waits for thee at home, and welcomes thee into thy place; while thou art worſhipping in the houſe of *Niſroch* thy god, two of thine own ſons ſhall be thine executioners.

ners. See now, if that falſe deity of thine can preſerve thee from that ſtroke, which the true God ſends thee by the hand of thine own fleſh. He, that ſlew thine hoſt by his angels, ſlays thee by thy ſons; the ſame angel, that killed all thoſe thouſands, could as eaſily have ſmitten thee: but he rather reſerves thee for the further torment of an unnatural ſtroke; that thou mayſt ſee, too late, how eaſy it is for him, in ſpite of thy god, to arm thine own loins againſt thee.

Thou art avenged, O God, thou art avenged plentifully of thine enemies. Whoſoever ſtrives with thee, is ſure to gain nothing but loſs, but ſhame, but death, but hell. The *Aſſyrians* are ſlain, *Sennacherib* is rewarded for his blaſphemy; *Jeruſalem* is reſcued, *Hezekiah* rejoices; the nations wonder and tremble. *O love the Lord, all ye ſaints; for the Lord preſerveth the faithful, and plenteouſly rewardeth the proud doer.*

CONTEM. X. HEZEKIAH *ſick, recovered, viſited.*

HEZEKIAH was freed from the ſiege of the *Aſſyrian*, but he is ſurpriſed with a diſeaſe. He, that delivered him from the hand of his enemies, ſmites him with ſickneſs. God doth not let us looſe from all afflictions, when he redeems us from one.

To think that *Hezekiah* was either not thankful enough for his deliverance, or too much lifted up with the glory of ſo miraculous a favour, were an injurious miſconſtruction of the hand of God, and an uncharitable cenſure of an holy prince: for, though no fleſh and blood can avoid the juſt deſert of bodily puniſhment, yet God doth not always ſtrike with an intuition of ſin: ſometimes he regards the benefit of our trial, ſometimes the glory of his mercy in our cure.

It was no ſlight diſtemper that ſeized upon *Hezekiah*, but a diſeaſe both painful and fierce, and in nature deadly. O God, how thou laſheſt even thoſe whom thou loveſt! Hadſt thou ever any ſuch darling in the throne of *Judah*, as *Hezekiah?* yet he no ſooner breatheth from a miſerable ſiege, than he panteth under a mortal ſickneſs, when as yet he had not ſo much as the comfort of a child to ſucceed him. Thy prophet is ſent to him with a heavy meſſage of his death; *Set thine houſe in order, for thou ſhalt die and not live.* It is no ſmall mercy of God, that he gives us warning of our end: we ſhall make an ill uſe of ſo gracious a premonition, if we make not a meet preparation for our paſſage. Even thoſe that have not an houſe, yet have a ſoul. No ſoul can want important affairs to be ordered for a final diſſolution; the neglect of this beſt thrift is deſperate. Set thy ſoul in order, O man, for thou ſhalt die and not live.

If God had given *Hezekiah* a ſon, nature had bequeathed his eſtate: now, he muſt ſtudy to find heirs. Even theſe outward things, though in themſelves worthleſs, require our careful diſpoſition to thoſe we leave behind us; and, if we have delayed theſe thoughts till then, our ſick-beds may not complain of their importunity. We cannot leave to our families a better legacy than peace.

Never was the prophet *Iſaiah* unwelcome to this good king, until now. Even ſad tidings muſt be carried by thoſe meſſengers which would be faithful: neither may we regard ſo much how they will be taken, as by whom they are ſent.

It was a bold and harſh word, to ſay to a king, *Thou ſhalt die and not live.* I do not hear *Hezekiah* rage, and fret at the meſſage, or threaten the bearer; but he meekly turns his face to the wall, and weeps, and prays. Why to the wall? was it for

for the greater ſecrecy of his devotion? was it for the more freedom from diſtraction? was it that all the paſſion, which accompanied his prayer, might have no witneſſes? or, was it for that this wall looked towards the temple, which his heart and eyes ſtill moved unto, though his feet could not?

Howſoever, the patient ſoul of good *Hezekiah* turns itſelf to that holy God, from whom he ſmarts and bleeds, and pours out itſelf into a fervent deprecation; *I beſeech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart; and have done that which is good in thy ſight.*

Couldſt thou fear, O *Hezekiah*, that God had forgotten thine integrity? the grace that was in thee was his own work; could he in thee neglect himſelf? or doſt thou therefore doubt of his remembrance of thy faithfulneſs, becauſe he ſummons thee to receive the crown of thy faithfulneſs, glory and immortality? wherein canſt thou be remembered, if this be to forget thee? what challenge is this? is God a debitor to thy perfection? Hath thine holy carriage merited any thing from that infinite juſtice? Far, far were theſe preſumptuous conceits from that humble and mortified ſoul. Thou hadſt hated thine own breaſt, if it could once have harboured ſo proud a thought. This perfection of thine was no other, than an honeſt ſoundneſs of heart and life, which thou knoweſt God had promiſed to reward. It was the mercy of the covenant that thou pleadeſt, not the merit of thine obedience.

Every one of theſe words were ſteeped in tears: but what meant theſe words, theſe tears? I hear not of any ſuit moved by *Hezekiah*, only he wiſhes to be remembered, in that which could never be forgotten, though he ſhould have intreated for an oblivion.

Speak out, *Hezekiah;* what is it that thy tears crave, while thy lips expreſs not? *O let me live and I ſhall praiſe thee, O God.*

In a natural man, none could wonder at this paſſionate requeſt; who can but wonder at it in a ſaint, whoſe happineſs doth but then begin when his life ceaſeth, whoſe miſery doth but then end when his death enters? The word of faith is, *O let me die, that I may enjoy thee.* How then doth the good king cry at the news of that death, which ſome reſolute Pagans have entertained with ſmiles? Certainly the beſt man cannot ſtrip himſelf of ſome fleſh; and, while nature hath an undeniable ſhare in him, he cannot but retain ſome ſmatch of the ſweetneſs of life, of the horrour of diſſolution: both theſe were in *Hezekiah*, neither of them could tranſport him into this paſſion: they were higher reſpects that ſwayed with ſo holy a prince; a tender care of the glory of God, a careful pity of the church of God. His very tears ſaid, O God, thou knoweſt, that the eyes of the world are bent upon me, as one that hath abandoned their idolatry, and reſtored thy ſincere worſhip; I ſtand alone in the midſt of a wicked and idolatrous generation, that looks through all my actions, all my events; if now they ſhall ſee me ſnatched away in the midſt of my days, what will theſe Heathens ſay; how can thy great name but ſuffer in this mine untimely extinction? Beſides, what will become of thy poor church, which I ſhall leave feebly religious, and as yet ſcarce warm, in the courſe of a pious reformation? how ſoon ſhall it be miſerably overgrown with ſuperſtition and heatheniſm? how ſoon ſhall the wild boar of *Aſſyria* root up this little vineyard of thine? What need I beſeech thee, O Lord, to regard thy name, to regard thine inheritance?

What

What one tear of *Hezekiah* can run waſte? what can that good king pray for, unheard, unanſwered? *Sennacherib* came, in a proud confidence, to ſwallow up his city and people: prayers and tears ſend him away confounded. Death comes to ſwallow up his perſon, and that not without authority; prayers and tears ſend him away diſappointed. Before *Iſaiah* was gone out into the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him, ſaying, *Turn again, and tell* Hezekiah *the captain of my people, thus ſaith the Lord, the God of* David *thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have ſeen thy tears, behold I will heal thee; on the third day thou ſhalt go up to the houſe of the Lord, and I will add to thy days fifteen years.*

What ſhall we ſay then, O God! haſt thou thus ſoon changed thy purpoſe? Was it not thy true meſſage which thy prophet, even now, delivered to *Hezekiah?* Is ſomewhat fallen out that thou foreſaweſt not? or doſt thou now decree ſomewhat thou meanteſt not? The very thought of any of theſe were no better than blaſphemous impiety. Certainly, *Hezekiah* could not live one day longer than was eternally decreed: the decree of God's eternal counſel had for everlaſting determined him fifteen years yet longer. Why then doth God ſay, by his prophet, *Thou ſhalt die, and not live?* He is not as man that he ſhould repent; the meſſage is changed, the will is not changed; yea, rather, the meſſage is explicated, not changed: for the ſignified will of God, though it ſound abſolutely, yet muſt be underſtood with condition; that tells *Hezekiah* what he muſt expect from the nature of his diſeaſe, what would befal him without his deprecations. There was nothing but death in the ſecond cauſes, whatever ſecret purpoſe there was in the firſt; and that purpoſe ſhall ly hid for a time, under a reſerved condition. The ſame decree that ſays, *Nineveh* ſhall be deſtroyed, means,

if

if *Nineveh* repent, it ſhall not be deſtroyed. He, that finds good reaſon to ſay *Hezekiah* ſhall die, yet ſtill means, if the quickened devotion of *Hezekiah* ſhall importune me for life, it ſhall be protracted. And the ſame God, that hath decreed this addition of fifteen years, had decreed to ſtir up the ſpirit of *Hezekiah* to that vehement and weeping importunity which ſhould obtain it. O God, thou workeſt thy good pleaſure in us, and with us; and, by thy revealed will, moveſt us in thoſe ways, whereby thou effecteſt thy ſecret will.

How wonderful is this mercy! *Hezekiah*'s tears are not dry upon his cheeks, yea his breath is not paſſed his lips, when God ſends him a comfortable anſwer. How careful is the God of compaſſions, that his holy ſervant ſhould not languiſh one hour, in the expectation of his denounced death? What ſpeed was here, as in the errand, ſo in the act of recovery? within three days ſhall *Hezekiah* be upon his feet; yea, his feet ſhall ſtand in the courts of God's houſe: he that now in his bed ſighs and groans, and weeps out a petition, ſhall then ſing out a thankſgiving in the temple. *O thou that heareſt prayer! unto thee ſhall all fleſh come.* With what cheerful aſſurance ſhould we approach to the throne of that grace, which never failed any ſuppliant.

Neither was this grant more ſpeedy than bountiful. We are wont to reckon ſeven years for the life of a man; and now, behold, more than two lives hath God added to the age of *Hezekiah*. How unexampled a favour is this! who ever but *Hezekiah* knew his period ſo long before! the fixedneſs of his term is no leſs mercy, than the protraction: we muſt be content to live or die at uncertainties. We are not worthy to calculate the date of our times. *Teach us, O Lord, ſo to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wiſdom.*

There

There is little joy in many days, if they be evil. *Hezekiah* ſhall not be bleſſed only with life, but with peace. The proud *Aſſyrian*, threatens an invaſion; his late foil ſtill ſticks in his ſtomach, and ſtirs him to a revenge: the hook is in his noſtrils, he cannot move whither he liſts. The God of heaven will maintain his own quarrel: *I will defend this city for mine own ſake, and for my ſervant* David's *ſake*. Lo, for his life, *Hezekiah* is beholden, next under the infinite goodneſs of God, to his prayers; for his protection, to the dear memory of his father *David!* Surely, for ought we find, *Hezekiah* was no leſs upright, and leſs offenſive than *David;* yet both *Hezekiah* and *Jeruſalem* ſhall fare the better for David's ſake, above three hundred years after.

To that man after his own heart, had God engaged himſelf, by his gracious promiſe, to preſerve his throne, his ſeed. God loves to remember his ancient mercies. How happy a thing is it to be faithful with God! This is the way to oblige thoſe which are yet unborn; and to entail bleſſings upon the ſucceſſions of future generations.

It ſeems it was ſome peſtilent ulcer that thus endangered the life of *Hezekiah*. *Iſaiah* is not a prophet only, but a phyſician. *And Iſaiah ſaid, Take a lump of figs*. He, that gave an aſſurance of recovery, gives a receipt for the recovery. The decree of God includes the means: neither can the medicine work without a word; neither will the word work without the medicine, both of them muſt meet in the cure. If we ſo truſt the promiſe, that we neglect the preſcript, we preſume to no purpoſe. Happy is that ſoul, that ſo regards the promiſe of God's prophets, as that withal he receives their counſels.

Nothing could be more proper for the ripening of hard and purulent tumours, than dry figs. Herein *Iſaiah*'s direction was according to nature; wherefore

fore ſhould we baulk the ordinary road, where it is both fair and near?

The ſudden contradiction of the meſſage cauſes a juſt difficulty in the aſſent. *Hezekiah* therefore craves a ſign; not for that he diſtruſted, but that he might truſt the more; we can never take too faſt hold of thoſe promiſes of God, which have not more comfort in the application, than natural impoſſibility in the performance. *We believe, Lord, help our unbelief.*

The ſick king hath his option; his father was offered a ſign, and refuſed it; he ſues for one, and obtains it: *Shall the ſhadow go forward ten degrees, or back ten degrees?* As if heaven itſelf lay open to his choice, and were ready either to mend his pace, or retire for his confirmation. What creature is not cheerfully forward to obey the faith of God's ſervants?

Hezekiah faſtens rather upon that ſign which is more hard, more diſagreeing from the courſe of nature; not without good reaſon: every proof muſt be clearer than the thing to be proved, neither may there want a meet proportion betwixt both: now, the going forward of the ſhadow was a motion, no other than natural, the recovery of that peſtilent diſeaſe was againſt the ſtream of nature; the more difficult ſign therefore, the ſurer evidence.

Whether ſhall we more wonder at the meaſure of the love of God to *Hezekiah*, or at the power of *Iſaiah*'s faith in God? Out of both, either the ſun goes back in heaven, that his ſhadow may go back on earth, or the ſhadow no leſs miraculouſly goes back on earth, while the ſun goes forward in heaven. It is true that the prophet ſpeaks of the ſhadow, not of the ſun; except perhaps becauſe the motion of the ſun is beſt diſcerned by the ſhadow, and the motion of the ſhadow is led by the courſe of the ſun: beſides, that

that the demonſtration of this miracle is reported to be local in the dial of *Ahaz*, not univerſal, in the ſenſible length of the day; withal, the retreat of the ſun had made a public and noted change in the frame of nature; this particular alteration of the ſhadow, in places limited, might ſatisfy no leſs without a confuſive mutation in the face of the world. Whetherſoever, to draw the ſun back together with the ſhadow, or to draw the ſhadow back without the ſun, was the proof of a divine omnipotence, able therefore to draw back the life of *Hezekiah*, fifteen degrees from the night of death, towards which it was haſtening.

O God, thou wilt rather alter the courſe of heaven and earth, than the faith of thy children ſhall ſink for want of ſupportation.

It ſhould ſeem, the *Babylonians*, finding the *Aſſyrian* power abated by the revengeful hand of God's angel, and their own diſcord, took this advantage of a revolt; and now, to ſtrengthen their part, fall in with *Hezekiah* king of *Judah*, whom they found the old enemy to the *Aſſyrians*, and the great favourite of heaven: him they woo with gifts, him they congratulate with embaſſages. The fame of *Hzeekiah*'s ſickneſs, recovery, form, and aſſurance of cure, have drawn thither meſſengers and preſents from *Berodach-baladan* king of *Babylon*.

The *Chaldees* were curious ſearchers into the ſecrets of nature, eſpecially into the motions of the celeſtial bodies; though there had been no politic relations, this very aſtronomical miracle had been enough to fetch them to *Jeruſalem*, that they might ſee the man, for whoſe ſake the ſun forſook his place, or the ſhadow forſook the ſun.

How eaſily have we ſeen thoſe holy men miſcarried by proſperity, againſt whom no miſeries could prevail! He that ſtood out ſtoutly againſt all the *Aſſyrian* onſets, clinging the faſter to his God, by how

much he was harder assaulted by *Sennacherib*, melteth now with these *Babylonian* favours, and runs abroad into offensive weaknesses.

The *Babylonian* ambassadors are too welcome to *Hezekiah:* as a man transported with the honour of their respective and costly visitations, he forgets his tears, and his turning to the wall; he forgets their incompatible idolatry, so hugging them in his bosom, as if there had been no cause of strangeness: all his doors fly open to them; and, in a vain-glorious ostentation, all his new-gathered treasures, all his strong armories entertain their eyes: nothing in his house, nothing in his dominion is hid from them.

O *Hezekiah*, what means this impotent ambition? it is not long since thou tearedst off the very plates of the temple doors, to give unto *Sennacherib;* and can thy treasures be suddenly so multiplied, that they can be worthy to astonish foreign beholders? or, if thy store-house were as rich as the earth, can thy heart be so vain as to be lifted up with these heavy metals? Didst thou not see that heaven itself was at thy beck, whilst thou wert humbled? and shall a little earthly dross have power over thy soul? Can the flattering applause of strangers let thee loose into a proud joy, whom the late message of God's prophet resolved into tears? O God, if thou do not keep us, as well in our sun-shine, as in our storm, we are sure to perish: as in all time of our tribulation, so in all time of our wealth, good Lord deliver us.

Alas, how slight doth this weakness seem in our eyes, to rejoice in the abundance of God's blessings, to call in foreign friends to be witnesses of our plenty; to raise our conceits some little, upon the acclamations of others, upon the value of our own abilities!

Lay thy hand upon thy mouth, O foolish flesh and blood, when thou seest the censure of thy Maker.

Isaiah

Iſaiah the prophet is ſent ſpeedily to *Hezekiah*, with a ſharp and heart-breaking meſſage; *Behold the days come that all that is in thine houſe, and that which thy fathers have laid up in ſtore unto this day, ſhall be carried into* Babylon; *nothing ſhall be left, ſaith the Lord; and of thy ſons that ſhall iſſue from thee, which thou ſhalt beget, ſhall they take away, and they ſhall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of* Babylon.

No ſin can be light in *Hezekiah:* the holineſs of the perſon adds to the unholineſs of the act; eminency of profeſſion doubles both the offence and the judgment. This glory ſhall end in an ignominious loſs.

The great and holy God will not digeſt pride in any, much leſs in his own. That which was the ſubject of *Hezekiah*'s ſin, ſhall be the matter of his puniſhment; thoſe with whom he ſinned ſhall be his avengers; it was his treaſure and munition, wherein he prides himſelf to theſe men of *Babylon*. The men of *Babylon* ſhall carry away his treaſure and munition. What now doth *Hezekiah* but tempt them with a glorious booty, as ſome fond traveller that would ſhow his gold to a thief?

Theſe worldly things are furtheſt off from the heart; perhaps *Hezekiah* might not be much troubled with their loſs. Lo! God comes cloſer to him yet.

As yet was *Hezekiah* childleſs; how much better had it been to continue ſo ſtill, than to be plagued in his iſſue! He ſhall now beget children to ſervitude, his loins ſhall yield pages to the court of *Babylon:* while he ſees them born princes, he ſhall foreſee them made eunuchs in a foreign palace. What comfort can he take in the wiſhes and hopes of ſons, when, ere they be born, he hears them deſtined to captivity and bondage!

This rod was ſmart, yet good *Hezekiah* kiſſes it: his heart ſtruck him no leſs, than the mouth of the

prophet; meekly therefore doth he yield to this divine correction; *Good is the word of the Lord which thou haſt ſpoken.* Thou haſt ſpoken this word, but from the Lord; it is not thine, but his; and, being his, it muſt needs be, like himſelf, good; good, becauſe it is juſt, for I have deſerved more, and worſe; good, becauſe merciful, for I ſuffer not according to my deſerts. *Is it not good, if there be peace and truth in my days.* I have deſerved a preſent payment, O God thou deferreſt it: I have deſerved it in perſon, thou reſerveſt it for thoſe whom I cannot yet ſo feel, becauſe they are not. I have deſerved war and tumult, thou favoureſt me with peace; I have deſerved to be over-run with ſuperſtition and idolatry, thou bleſſeſt me with truth: ſhouldſt thou continue truth unto me, though upon the moſt unquiet terms, the bleſſing were too good for me; but now thou haſt promiſed, and will not reverſe it, that both truth and peace ſhall be in my days. Lord, I adore thy juſtice, I bleſs thy mercy.

God's children are neither waſpiſh nor ſullen, when they are chid or beaten, but patiently hold their backs to the ſtripes of a diſpleaſed mercy; knowing how much more God is to be magnified, for what he might have done, than repined at for what he hath done; reſigning themſelves over into the hand of that gracious juſtice, which in their ſmart ſeeks their reformation and glory.

CONTEM. XI. MANASSEH.

AT laſt, ſome three years after his recovery, *Hezekiah* hath a ſon; but ſuch a one as, if he could have foreſeen, orbity had been a bleſſing.

Still in the throne of *Judah* there is a ſucceſſion, and interchange of good and evil. Good *Jotham* is ſucceeded

ſucceeded by wicked *Ahaz;* wicked *Ahaz* is ſucceeded by good *Hezekiah;* good *Hezekiah* is ſucceeded by wicked *Manaſſeh*. Evil princes ſucceed to good, for the exerciſe of the church; and good ſucceed to evil, for the comfort of the church.

The young years of *Manaſſeh* gave advantage to his miſcarriage; even while he might have been under the ferule, he ſwayed the ſcepter. Whither may not a child be drawn, eſpecially to a gairiſh, and puppet-like ſuperſtition? as infancy is capable of all impreſſions, ſo moſt of the worſt.

Neither did *Manaſſeh* begin more early than he held out long; he reigned more years than his good father lived, notwithſtanding the miraculous addition to his age, more than ever any king of *Judah* beſides could reach. Length of days is no true rule of God's favour: as plants laſt longer than ſenſitive creatures, and brute creatures out-live the reaſonable; ſo, amongſt the reaſonable, it is no news for the wickedly great to inherit theſe earthly glories, longer than the beſt.

There wants not apparent reaſon for this difference. Good princes are fetcht away to a better crown: they cannot be loſers, that exchange a weak and fading honour for a perfection and eternity of bleſſedneſs. Wicked men live long to their own diſadvantage; they do but carry ſo many more brands to their hell. If therefore there be a juſt man that periſheth in his righteouſneſs, and there be a wicked man that prolongs his life in his wickedneſs, far be it from us, either to pity the removal of the juſt, or to envy the continuance of the wicked. This continues to his loſs, that departs to an happy advancement.

It is very like that *Hezekiah* marrying ſo late, in the vigour both of his age and holineſs, made a careful choice of a wife ſuitable to his own piety: neither

ther had his delight been ſo much in her, according to her name, if her delight had not been, as his, in God; their iſſue ſwerves from both, ſo fully inheriting the vices of his grand-father *Ahaz*, as if there had been no intervention of an *Hezekiah*: ſo we have ſeen the kernel of a well-fruited plant degenerate into that crab, or willow, which gave the original to his ſtock: yet can I not ſay, that *Hezekiah* was as free from traducing evil to his ſon *Manaſſeh*, as *Ahaz* was free from traducing good to his ſon *Hezekiah*. Evil is incorporated in the beſt nature, whereas even the leaſt good deſcends from above.

We may not meaſure grace by means. Was it poſſible that *Manaſſeh*, having been trained up in the religious court of his father *Hezekiah*, under the eye of ſo holy prophets and prieſts, under the ſhadow of the temple of God, after a childhood ſeaſoned with ſo gracious precepts, with ſo frequent exerciſe of devotion, ſhould run thus wild into all heatheniſh abominations, as if there had been nothing but idolatry in the ſeed of his conception, in the milk of his nouriſhment, in the rules of his inſtitution, in the practice of his examples? How vain are all outward helps without the influence of God's ſpirit, and that ſpirit that breathes where he liſteth! Good education raiſeth great hopes; but the proof of them is in the divine benediction.

I fear to look at the outrages of this wicked ſon of *Hezekiah*: what havock doth he make in the church of God! as if he had been born to ruin religion; as if his only felicity had been to untwiſt, or tear, in one day, that holy web which his father had been weaving, nine and twenty years; and contrarily, in one hour, to ſet up that offenſive pile which had been above three hundred years in pulling down: ſo long had the high places ſtood. The zeal of *Hezekiah*, in demoliſhing them, honoured him above all his

his predeceſſors; and now the firſt act of this green head was their re-edifying. That miſchief may be done in a day, which many ages cannot redreſs.

Fearful were the preſages of theſe bold beginnings. From the miſbuilding of theſe chapels of the hills to the true God, *Manaſſeh* proceeds to erecting of altars to a falſe, even to *Baal*, the god of *Ahab*, the ſtale idol of the Heathen: yet further, not content with ſo few deities, he worſhips all the hoſt of heaven, and, that he might deſpite God yet more, he ſets up altars to theſe abuſed rivals of their Maker, in the very houſe of the Lord; that holy place doth he not fear to defile with the graven image of the grove that he had made. Never *Amorite* did ſo wickedly as *Manaſſeh;* and, which was yet worſe, it ſufficed not to be thus wicked himſelf, but he ſeduced God's people to theſe abominations: and, that his example might move the more, he ſpares not his own ſon from the fire of the idol-ſacrifice. Neither were his witcheries leſs enormous than his idolatry; he obſerved times, he uſed inchantments, he dealt with familiar ſpirits, and with wizards: neither were either of theſe worſe than his cruelty. He ſhed innocent blood, till he had filled *Jeruſalem* from one end to another.

O *Manaſſeh*, how no leſs cruel wert thou to thine own ſoul, than to thy *Judah!* What an hideous lift of monſtrous impieties is here; any one of which were enough to draw judgment upon a world; but what hell is ſufficient for all together!

What brows are not now lifted up to an attentive expectation of ſome preſent and fearful vengeance from God, upon ſuch flagitious wickedneſs? *Therefore, thus ſaith the Lord, Behold, I am bringing ſuch evil upon* Jeruſalem *and* Judah, *that whoſoever heareth of it, both his ears ſhall tingle.* The perſon of *Manaſſeh* is not capable of revenge enough;

as

as his ſin dilated itſelf by an infectious diffuſion to his people, ſo ſhall the puniſhment. We are ſenſible of the leaſt touch of our own miſeries; how rarely are we affected with other mens calamities! Yet this evil ſhall be ſuch, as that the rumour of it ſhall beat no ear, that ſhall not glow with an aſtoniſhing commiſeration. What then, O God, what ſhall that plague be, which thou threateneſt with ſo much preface of horror? *I will ſtretch over* Jeruſalem *the line of* Samaria, *and the plummet of the houſe of* Ahab; *and I will wipe* Jeruſalem, *as a man wipeth a diſh, wiping it, and turning it upſide down: and I will forſake the remnant of mine inheritance; and I will deliver them into the hand of their enemies, and they ſhall become a prey and a ſpoil unto all their enemies.*

It is enough, O God, it is enough. What ear can but tingle! what eye can but weep! what hair can but ſtart up! what heart can be but confounded, at the mention of ſo dreadful a revenge! Can there be a worſe judgment than deſolation, captivity, deſertion, ſpoil, and torture of prevailing enemies? But however other cities and nations have undergone theſe diſaſters, without wonder, that all this ſhould befal to thy *Jeruſalem*, the place which thou haſt choſen to thyſelf, out of the whole earth, the lot of thine inheritance, the ſeat of thine abode, whereof thou haſt ſaid, *Here ſhall be my reſt for ever*, it is able to amaze all eyes, all ears.

No city could fare worſe than *Samaria*, whoſe inhabitants, after a woful ſiege, were driven, like cattle, into a wretched ſervitude: *Jeruſalem* ſhall fare no better from *Nebuchadnezzar* the king of *Babylon*. *Jeruſalem*, the glory of the earth, the darling of heaven. See, O ye vain men, that boaſt of the privileges of chairs and churches, ſee and tremble. There is no place under heaven, to which the preſence of God is

ſo

ſo wedded, as that the ſins thereof ſhall not procure a diſdainful and final divorce: the height of former favours ſhall be but an aggravation of vengeance.

This total vaſtation of *Jeruſalem* ſhall take time. Onwards, God begins with the perſon of wicked *Manaſſeh*, againſt whom he ſtirs up the captains of the hoſt of the late friend, and old enemy of *Judah*. Thoſe thorns, amongſt which he had ſhrouded his guilty head, cannot ſhelter him from their violence; they take him and bind him with fetters of iron, and carry him to *Babylon;* there he lies, loaded with chains, in an uncomfortable dungeon, exerciſed with variety of tortures, fed with ſuch coarſe pittances of bread, and ſips of water, as might maintain an unwilling life to the puniſhment of the owner. What eye can now pity the deepeſt miſeries of *Manaſſeh?* What but bondage can befit him, that hath ſo lawleſly abuſed his liberty? what but an utter abdication can befit him that hath caſt off his God, and doted upon devils? what but a dying life, and a tormenting death, can be fit for a man of blood?

Who now would not have given this man for loſt, and have looked when hell ſhall claim her own? But, O the height, O the depth of divine mercy! After all theſe prodigies of ſin, *Manaſſeh* is a convert; *When he was in affliction, he beſought the Lord his God; and humbled himſelf greatly before the God of his fathers.* How true is that word of the prophet! *Vexation gives underſtanding.* The viper, when he is laſhed, caſts up his poiſon. The traitor, when he is racked, tells that truth which he had elſe never uttered. If the croſs bear us not to heaven, nothing can. What uſe were there of the grain, but for the edge of the ſickle wherewith it is cut down, the ſtroke of the flail wherewith it is beaten, the weight and attrition of the mill wherewith it is cruſhed, the fire of the oven wherewith it is baken? Say now,

Manaſſeh, with that grandfather of thine, who was, till now, too good for thee, *It was good for me that I was afflicted*. Even thine iron was more precious to thee than thy gold; thy gaol was a more happy lodging to thee than thy palace: *Babylon* was a better ſchool to thee than *Jeruſalem*. What fools are we to frown upon our afflictions! Theſe, how crabbed ſoever, are our beſt friends. They are not indeed for our pleaſure, they are for our profit: their iſſue makes them worthy of a welcome. What do we care how bitter that potion be, which brings health?

How far a man may go, and yet turn! Could there be fouller ſins than theſe? lo! here was idolatry in the height, violation of God's houſe, ſorceries of all kinds, bloody cruelty to his own fleſh, to the ſaints of God, and all theſe againſt the ſtream of a religious inſtitution, of the zealous counſels of God's prophets, of the checks of his own heart.

Who can complain, that the way of heaven is blocked up againſt him, when he ſees ſuch a ſinner enter? Say the worſt againſt thyſelf, O thou clamorous ſoul, here is one that murdered men, defied God, worſhipped devils, and yet finds the way to repentance; if thou be worſe than he, deny, if thou canſt, that to thyſelf, which God hath not denied to thee, capacity of grace: in the mean time know, that it is not thy ſin, but thine impenitence, that bars heaven againſt thee.

Preſume not yet, O man, whoſoever thou art, of the liberty of thy converſion, as if thou couldſt run on lawleſly in a courſe of ſinning, till thou come to the brim of hell, and then couldſt ſuddenly ſtop, and return at leiſure. The mercy of God never ſet period to a wilful ſinner; neither yet did his own corrupt deſires, ſo as, when he is gone the furtheſt, he could yet ſtay himſelf from another ſtep. No man that truly repents

repents is refuſed; but many a one ſins ſo long, that he cannot repent: his cuſtom of wickedneſs hath obdured his heart, and made it flint to all good impreſſions. There were *Jeroboams*, and *Abijams*, and *Ahabs*, and *Joaſhes*, and *Ahazes*, in theſe ſacred thrones; there was but one *Manaſſeh*. God hath not left in any man's hand the reins of his own heart, to pace, and turn, and ſtop as he liſts: this privilege is reſerved to him that made it. *It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that ſhews mercy;* and that mercy neglected, juſtly binds over to judgment.

I wonder not at *Manaſſeh*, either ſinning or repenting; I wonder at thy goodneſs, O Lord, who, after thy juſt permiſſion of his ſin, calleſt him thus graciouſly to repent, and ſo receiveſt him repenting; ſo as *Manaſſeh* was not a more loathſome and monſtrous ſpectacle of wickedneſs, than he is now a pleaſing and uſeful pattern of converſion: who can now deſpair of thy mercy, O God, that ſees the tears of a *Manaſſeh* accepted? When we have debauched our worſt, our evil cannot match with thy goodneſs; rather it is the praiſe of thy infinite ſtore, that where ſin abounds, grace abounds much more. O keep us from a preſumption of grace, that we may repent; and raiſe us from a diſtruſt of grace, when we have repented.

No ſooner is *Manaſſeh* penitent, than he is free; his prayers have at once looſed him from his ſins, and from his chains, and of a captive have made him a king; and, from the dungeon of *Babylon*, have reſtored him to the palace of *Jeruſalem*. How eaſy is it for the ſame hand, that wounds, to cure! What cannot fervent prayers do, either for our reſcuing from evil, or for our inveſting with good!

Then Manaſſeh *knew that the Lord he was God;* then, and not before. Could his younger years e-

ſcape the knowledge of God's miraculous deliverance of *Jeruſalem* from the *Aſſyrians?* could he but know the ſlaughter that God's angel made, in one night, of an hundred fourſcore and five thouſand? could he but have heard the juſt revenge upon *Senacherib?* could he be ignorant of his father's ſupernatural recovery? could he but ſee that everlaſting monument of the noted degrees in the dial of *Ahaz?* could he avoid the ſenſe of thoſe fifteen years which were ſuperadded to his father's age? what one of thoſe proofs doth not evince a Deity? yet, till his own ſmart and cure, *Manaſſeh* knew not, that the Lord was God.

Fooliſh ſinners pay dear for their knowledge; neither will endure to be taught, good cheap: ſo we have ſeen reſty horſes, that will not move, till they bleed with the ſpur; ſo we have ſeen dull and careleſs children, that will learn nothing but what is put into them with the rod.

The Almighty will be ſure to be known for what he is, if not by fair means, yet by foul. If our proſperity and peace, and ſweet experience of his mercy, can win us to acknowledge him, it is more for our eaſe; but, if we will needs be taught by ſtripes, it is no leſs for his glory.

Manaſſeh now returns another man to *Jeruſalem*. With what indignation doth he look upon his old follies! and now, all the amends he can make, is to undo what he did, to do that which he undid: *He took away the ſtrange gods, and the idol out of the houſe of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the houſe of the Lord, and in* Jeruſalem, *and caſt them out of the city.* True repentance begins to decline at the ablative, deſtroying thoſe monuments of ſhame which former error had reared. The thorns muſt firſt be ſtubbed up, ere the ground can be capable of ſeed. The true method of

of grace is firſt. *Ceaſe to do evil, then learn to do good.*

In vain had *Manaſſeh* profeſſed a repentance, if the ſtrange gods had ſtill held poſſeſſion of *Jeruſalem*, if the idol had ſtill harboured in God's temple, if foreign altars had ſtill ſmoked upon the holy mountain. Away with all his traſh, when once *Manaſſeh* comes to a true ſenſe of piety.

There is nothing but hypocriſy in that penitent, who, after all vows, and tears, retains his old abominations. It is that poor peace of ſatisfaction which we can give to the divine juſtice, in a hearty indignation, to fling down that cup of wickedneſs wherewith we have been bewitched, and to trample upon the ſherds; without which, confeſſion is but wind, and the drops of contrition, water.

The living God loves to dwell clean; he will not come under the roof of idols, nor admit idols to come under his. Firſt, therefore, *Manaſſeh* caſts out the ſtrange gods and idols, and altars, and then *he repairs the altars of the Lord, and ſacrifices thereon peace-offerings and thankſgivings:* not till he had pulled down, might he build; and when he had pulled down, he muſt build. True repentance is no leſs active of good. What is it the better, if, when the idolatrous altars are defaced, the true God hath not an altar erected to his name? in many altars was ſuperſtition, in no altars atheiſm.

Neither doth penitent *Manaſſeh* build God a new altar, but he repairs the old, which, by long diſuſe, lay waſte, and was moſſy and mouldered with age and neglect.

God loves well his own inſtitutions; neither can he abide innovations, ſo much as in the outſides of his ſervice. It is an happy work to vindicate any ordinance of God from the injuries of times, and to reſtore it to the original glory.

What

What have our pious governors done other in religion? had we gone about to lay a new foundation, the work had been accurſed; now we have only ſcraped off ſome ſuperfluous moſs, that was grown upon theſe holy ſtones; we have cemented ſome broken pieces, we have pointed ſome crazy corners with wholeſome mortar, inſtead of baſe clay wherewith it was diſgracefully patched up. The altar is old; it is God's altar; it is not new, not ours: if we have laid one new ſtone in this ſacred building, let it fly in our faces, and beat out our eyes.

On this repaired altar, doth *Manaſſeh* ſend up the ſacrifices of his peace, of his thankfulneſs; and doubtleſs the God of heaven ſmells a ſweet ſavour of reſt. No perfume is ſo pleaſing to God, as that which is caſt in by a penitent hand.

It had not ſerved the turn, that *Manaſſeh* had approached alone to this renewed altar: as his lewd example had drawn the people from their God, ſo now *he commands* Judah *to ſerve the Lord God of* Iſrael: had he been ſilent, he could not have been unfollowed. Every act of greatneſs is preceptive; but now, that religion is made law, what *Iſraelite* will not be devout?

The true God hath now no competitor in *Judah*: all the idols are pulled down, the high places will not be pulled down; an ill guiſe is eaſily taken up, it is not ſo eaſily left. After a common depravation of religion, it is hard to return unto the firſt purity: as when a garment is deeply ſoiled, it cannot, without many lavers, recover the former cleanneſs.

CONTEM. XII. JOSIAH'S *reformation.*

YET, if we muſt altar from ourſelves, it is better to be a *Manaſſeh* than a *Joaſh*: *Joaſh* began well, and ended ill: *Manaſſeh* began ill, and ended

ended well. His age varied from his youth, no leſs than one man's condition can vary from another's; his poſterity ſucceeded in both. *Ammon*, his ſon, ſucceeded in the ſins of *Manaſſeh*'s youth; *Joſiah*, his grand-child, ſucceeded in the virtues of his age: what a vaſt difference doth grace make in the ſame age! *Manaſſeh* began his reign at twelve years, *Joſiah* at eight; *Manaſſeh* was religiouſly bred under *Hezekiah*, *Joſiah* was miſnurtured under *Ammon;* and yet *Manaſſeh* runs into abſurd idolatries, *Joſiah* is holy and devout. The ſpirit of God breathes freely, not confining itſelf to times, or means.

No rules can bind the hands of the Almighty. It is an ordinary proof, too true a word, that was ſaid of old, *Wo be to thee, O land, whoſe king is a child.* The goodneſs of God makes his own exceptions: *Judah* never fared better, than in the green years of a *Joſiah;* if we may not rather meaſure youth and age by government and diſpoſition, than by years, ſurely thus *Joſiah* was older with ſmooth cheeks, than *Manaſſeh* with grey hairs. Happy is the infancy of princes, when it falls into the hands of faithful counſellors.

A good pattern is no ſmall help for young beginners. *Joſiah* ſets his father *David* before him, not *Ammon*, not *Manaſſeh*. Examples are the beſt rules for the unexperienced; where their choice is good, the directions are eaſieſt. The laws of God are the ways of *David:* thoſe laws were the rule, thoſe ways were the practice. Good *Joſiah* walks in all the ways of his father *David*.

Even the minority of *Joſiah* was not idle; we cannot be good too early. At eight years it was enough to have his ear open to hear good counſel, to have his eyes and heart open to ſeek after God; at twelve, he begins to act, and ſhews well that he hath found the God he ſought. Then he addreſſes himſelf to purge

purge *Judah* and *Jeruſalem*, from the high places, groves, images, altars, wherewith it was defiled; burning the bones of the idolatrous prieſts upon their altars; ſtrewing the aſhes of the idols upon the graves of them that had ſacrificed to them, ſtriving, by thoſe fires and mattocks, to teſtify his zealous deteſtation of all idolatry.

The houſe muſt be firſt cleanſed, ere it can be garniſhed; no man will caſt away his coſt upon unclean heaps. So ſoon as the temple was purged, *Joſiah* bends his thoughts upon the repairing and beautifying of this houſe of the Lord.

What ſtir was there in *Judah*, wherein God's temple ſuffered not? Six ſeveral times was it pillaged, whether out of force, or will. Firſt, *Joaſh* king of *Judah* is fain, by the ſpoil of it, to ſtop the mouth of *Hazael*; then *Joaſh* king of *Iſrael* fills his own hands with that ſacred ſpoil, in the days of *Amaziah*; after this, *Ahaz* rifles it for *Tiglath-pileſer* king of *Aſſyria*; then *Hezekiah* is forced to ranſack the treaſures of it for *Senacherib*; yet, after, the ſacrilege of *Manaſſeh* makes that booty of it, which his latter times endeavoured to reſtore; and now, laſtly, *Ammon* his ſon neglects the frame, embezzles the furniture of this holy place: the very pile began to complain of age and unreſpect. Now comes good *Joſiah*, and, in his eighteenth year, (when other young gallants would have thought of nothing but pleaſure and jollity), takes up the lateſt care of his father *David*, and gives order for the repairing of the temple.

The keepers of the door have received the contribution of all faithful *Jews*, for this pious uſe. The king ſends *Shaphan* the ſcribe to *Hilkiah* the prieſt, to ſum it up, and to deliver it unto carpenters and maſons, for ſo holy a work.

How well doth it beſeem the care of a religious prince, to ſet the prieſts and ſcribes in hand with re-

edifying

edifying the temple? The command is the king's, the charge is the high prieſt's, the execution is the workmens. When the labourers are faithful in doing the work, and the high prieſt in directing it, and the king in enjoining it, God's houſe cannot fail of an happy perfection; but when any of theſe ſlackens, the buſineſs muſt needs languiſh.

How God bleſſes the devout endeavours of his ſervants! While *Hilkiah* was diligently ſurveying the breaches, and reparation of the temple, he lights upon the book of the law. The authentic and original book of God's law, was, by a ſpecial charge, appointed to be carefully kept within a ſafe ſhrine in the ſanctuary. In the depraved times of idolatry, ſome faithful prieſt, to make ſure work, had locked it faſt up, in ſome corner of the temple, from the reach of all hands, of all eyes, as knowing how impoſſible it was, that divine monument could otherways eſcape the fury of profane guiltineſs. Some few tranſcripts there were, doubtleſs, parcels of this ſacred book in other hands: neither doubt I, but, as *Hilkiah* had been formerly well acquainted with this holy volume, now of a long time hid, ſo the ears of good *Joſiah* had been inured to ſome paſſages thereof; but the whole body of theſe awful records, ſince the late night of idolatrous confuſion and perſecution, ſaw no light till now. This precious treaſure doth *Hilkiah* find, while he digs for the temple. Never man laboured to the reparation of God's church, but he met with a bleſſing more than he looked for.

Hilkiah the prieſt, and *Shaphan* the ſcribe, do not ingroſs this invaluable wealth into their own hands, nor ſuppreſs theſe more than ſacred rolls, for their own advantage, but tranſmit them firſt to the ears of the king, then by him to the people. It is not the praiſe of a good ſcribe, to lay up, but to bring forth, both old and new. And if the prieſt's lips

ſhall keep knowledge, they keep it to impart, not to ſmother: *The people ſhall ſeek the law at his mouth; for he is the meſſenger of the Lord of hoſts.*

So ſoon as the good king hears the words of the book of the law, and, in ſpecial, thoſe dreadful threats of judgment denounced againſt the idolatries of his *Judah*, he rends his clothes, to ſhow his heart rent with ſorrow, and fearful expectation of thoſe plagues; and waſhes his boſom with tears. O gracious tenderneſs of *Joſiah!* he doth but once hear the law read, and is thus humbled; humbled for his fathers ſins, for the ſins of his people. How many of us, after a thouſand hammerings of the menaces of God's law upon our guilty ſouls, continue yet inſenſible of our danger! The very reading of this law doth thus affect him, the preaching of it ſtirs not us: the ſins of others ſtruck thus deep with him, our own are ſlighted by us. A ſoft heart is the beſt tempered for God. So phyſicians are wont to like thoſe bodies beſt, which are eaſieſt to work upon. O God, make our clay wax, and our wax pliable to thine hand, ſo ſhall we be ſure to be free either from ſin, or from the hurt of ſin.

It is no holy ſorrow that ſends us not to God. *Joſiah* is not moped with a diſtractive grief, or an aſtoniſhing fear, but, in the height of his paſſion, ſends five choice meſſengers to *Huldah* the propheteſs, to inquire of the Lord, for himſelf, for *Judah*. It is an happy trouble that drives us to this refuge. I do not hear any of theſe courtiers reply to this godly motion of their young king, Alas, ſir, what means this deep perplexity? what needs all this buſy inquiſition? if your father were idolatrous, what is that to you who have abandoned his ſins? if your people were once idolatrous, what is that to you, yea to them, who have expiated theſe crimes by their repentance? have you

you not carefully reformed all thoſe abuſes? hath not your happy reformation made an abundant amends for thoſe wrongs? ſpare your tears, and ſave the labour of your meſſengers; all is well, all ſhall be well; theſe judgments are for the obſtinate; had we been ſtill guilty, theſe fears had been juſt: were we ſtill in danger, what had we gained by our converſion? Rather, as glad to ſecond the religious cares of their young king, they feed his holy anxieties with a juſt aggravation of peril; and, by their good counſel, whet theſe his zealous deſires of a ſpeedy reſolution. That ſtate cannot but be happy, whoſe prieſts and peers are ready, as to ſuggeſt, ſo to cheriſh and execute the devout projects of their ſovereigns.

The grave prieſt, the learned ſcribe, the honourable courtiers do not diſdain to knock at the door of a propheteſs: neither doth any of them ſay, it were hard if we ſhould not have as much acquaintance with God, as a woman; but in an humble acknowledgment of her graces, they come to learn the will of God from her mouth. True piety is modeſt, and ſtands not upon terms of reputation, in the buſineſſes of God, but willingly honours his gifts in any ſubject, leaſt of all in itſelf.

The ſex is not more noted in *Huldah*, than the condition. As ſhe was a woman, ſo a wife, the wife of *Shallum*. Holy matrimony was no hinderance to her divine revelations; ſhe was at once a propheteſs in her college, an houſewife in her family. It was never the practice of God to confine his graces to virginity. At this very time, the famous prophet *Jeremiah* flouriſhed; ſome years had he already ſpent in this public ſervice; why was not he rather conſulted by *Joſiah?* It is not unlike, that ſome prophetical employments called him away at this time from *Jeruſalem:* his preſence could not have been baulked. Purpoſely, doubtleſs, doth God caſt his meſſage upon

the point of that abſence, that he might honour the weaker veſſel with his divine oracle, and exerciſe the humility of ſo great clients. In the anſwers of God, it is not to be regarded who ſpeaks, but from whom. The injury redounds to God, if the weakneſſes of the perſon cauſe us to undervalue the authority of the function.

As *Joſiah* and his meſſengers do not deſpiſe *Huldah*, becauſe ſhe was a woman, ſo *Huldah* doth not flatter *Joſiah*, becauſe a king: *Go tell the man that ſent you, thus ſaith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place.* Lo, he that was as God to his ſubjects, is but as man to the propheteſs: neither is the meſſage ever the ſweeter, becauſe it is required by a prince. No circumſtance may vary the form of divine truth.

Evil muſt befal *Jeruſalem* and *Judah*, yea, all the words of that book muſt alight upon the inhabitants of both. In how bad a caſe we may be, and yet think ourſelves not ſafe only, but happy! Theſe *Jews* had forgotten their old revolts; and now, having framed themſelves to holy courſes, promiſed themſelves nothing but peace, when the propheteſs foreſees and foretels their approaching ruin. Even their old ſcore muſt be paid, after the opinion of a clear agreement. In vain ſhall we hope to quit our arrearages by prorogation. This propheteſs had immediate viſions from God, yet ſhe muſt ſpeak out of the book. There was never any revelation from the Lord that croſſed his writings: his hand and his tongue agree eternally. If that book have curſed *Judah*, ſhe may not abſolve it.

Yet, what a gracious mixture was here of mercy with ſeverity; ſeverity to *Judah*, mercy to *Joſiah*: *Judah* ſhall be plagued, and ſhall become a deſolation, and a curſe. *Joſiah* ſhall be quietly houſed in his grave, before this ſtorm fall upon *Judah*: his eye ſhall not ſee what his people ſhall feel. It is enough that the

the expectation of theſe evils afflicts him, the ſenſe ſhall not.

Whence is this indulgence? *Becauſe thine heart was tender, and thou haſt humbled thyſelf before the Lord.* How happy a thing it is to be a reed unto God's judgments, rather than an oak! the meek and gentle reed ſtoops, and therefore ſtands; the oak ſtands ſtiffly out againſt the ſtrongeſt guſt, and therefore is turned up by the roots. At leaſt, let us lament thoſe ſins we have not avoided; and mourn for the ſins of others, while we hate our own.

He that found himſelf exempted from this vengeance, by his repentance and deep humiliation, would fain find the ſame way for the deliverance of his people. The ſame words of the law therefore, that had wrought upon his heart, are by him cauſed to be publicly read in the ears of *Judah* and *Jeruſalem*. The aſſembly is univerſal, of prieſts, prophets, people both ſmall and great; becauſe the ſin was ſuch, the danger was ſuch: that no man may complain to want information, the law of God ſounds in every ear. If our ears be ſhut to the law, the ſin is ours: but, if the law be ſhut to our ears, the ſin is of our governors. Wo be to them that hide God's book from the people, as they would do ratsbane from the eyes of children. Ignorant ſouls cannot periſh without their murder. There is no fear of knowing too much, there is too much fear of practiſing too little. Now, if the people do not imitate their king in relenting, they are not worthy to partake with him in his impunity. Howſoever, they ſhall not want a great example, as of ſorrow, ſo of amendment. Good *Joſiah* ſtands by the pillar, and ſolemnly renews his covenant with his God; the people cannot for ſhame refuſe to ſecond him: even they that looked for a deſtruction, yet do not withdraw their obedience. God's children may not be ſullen under his corrections, but, whether they expect or feel ſmart,

ſmart, are no other than dutiful to his awful hand. As a man, that finds he hath done ſomething that might endanger the forfeit of his favour, puts himſelf into ſome deſerving action, whereby he may hope to re-endear himſelf, ſo doth *Joſiah* here. No endeavour is enough to teſtify his zeal to that name of God which was ſo profaned by his people's idolatry; whatever monuments were yet remaining of wicked Paganiſm, he defaces with indignation: he burns the veſſels of *Baal*, and puts down his *Chemarim*, deſtroys the houſes of the *Sodomites*, ſtrews the powder of their idols in the brook *Kidron*, defiles *Tophet*, takes away the horſes of the ſun, burns the chariots of the ſun with fire, and omits nothing that might reconcile God, clear *Judah*, perfect a reformation.

Neither is this care confined to *Jeruſalem*, and the neighbouring towns, but ſtretches itſelf to the utmoſt coaſts of *Joſiah*'s kingdom; *Bethel* was the infamous ſeat of the pollution of *Iſrael*: it ſeems the heirs of *Jeroboam*, who ſet up his golden calf there, enjoyed it not long; the kings of *Judah* recovered it to their crown, but it had not yet recovered itſelf from that ancient infection. Thither doth good *Joſiah* ſend the unhallowed aſhes of *Baal*'s reliques, to ſtain that altar firſt, which he will ſoon after deface.

The time was, and it was no leſs than three hundred and fifty years ſince, that the man of God, out of *Judah*, cried againſt *Jeroboam*'s altar.

O altar, altar! thus ſaith the Lord, Behold a child ſhall be born unto the houſe of David, Joſiah *by name, and upon thee ſhall he offer the prieſts of the high places, that burnt incenſe upon thee, and mens bones ſhall be burnt upon thee.*

And now is the hour come, wherein every of thoſe words ſhall be accompliſhed. It could not but be a great confirmation to *Joſiah*, to ſee, that God ſo long ago

ago foremarked him for his own, and forenamed him to ſo zealous a ſervice.

All our names are equally foreknown of that divine Providence, though not foreſpoken: neither can any act paſs from us, which was not predetermined in that eternal counſel of the Almighty: neither can any act, that is pre-determined, be unfulfilled upon earth. Intervention of time breaks no ſquare in the divine decree: out purblind eyes ſee nothing, but that which toucheth their lids; the quick ſight of God's preſcience ſees that, as preſent, which is a world off. According to the prediction, the ſtench of dead mens bones is a fit perfume to ſend up from this altar to heaven, whoſe beſt ſacrifices ſavoured worſe in the noſtrils of God: and the blood of the idolatrous ſacrificers was a meet oblation to that God, who had been diſhonoured by their burnt-offerings to his baſe corrivals.

Even that prophet, who foretold this, had his tomb in *Bethel*, and that tomb had his inſcription; his weakneſs might not rob him of the honour of his ſepulture. How palpably doth theſe *Iſraelites* condemn themſelves, while they reſerve ſo famous a monument of their own conviction! It was no prejudice to this holy prophet, that his bones lay amongſt the ſepulchres of idolaters. His epitaph preſerved thoſe bones from burning upon that altar, which he had accurſed; as the lion might not tear his carcaſe when he died, ſo now the fury of the multitude may not violate the very bones in his grave.

I do not ſee *Joſiah* ſave them for reliques; I hear him command they ſhall reſt in peace. It is fit the dead bodies of God's ſaints ſhould be as free from contempt, as from ſuperſtition.

After the removal of theſe rites of falſe worſhip, it is time to bring in the true. Now a ſolemn paſſover ſhall be kept unto the Lord, by the charge of *Joſiah*: that

that book of the law ſets him the time, place, circumſtances, of this ſacrament; his zeal ſo carefully follows it, that, ſince the days of *Samuel*, this feaſt was never ſo glorioufly, ſo punctually celebrated. *Jeruſalem* is the place, the fourteenth day of the firſt month is the time, the *Levites* are the actors, a yearly and ſpotleſs lamb is the proviſion; no bone of it is broken, the blood is ſprinkled upon the door-poſts, it is roaſted whole, eaten with ſour herbs, with bread unleavened; the remainder is conſumed by fire. The law, the ſacrifices, had been in vain, if the paſſover had been neglected. No true *Iſraelite* might want, whether this monument of their deliverance paſt, or this type of the Meſſiah to come. Rather than fail, *Joſiah*'s bounty ſhall ſupply to *Judah* lambs for their paſchal devotion. No alms is ſo acceptable, as that whereby the ſoul is furthered.

CONTEM. XIII. JOSIAH's *death, with the deſolation of the temple and* JERUSALEM.

JOSIAH hath now happily ſettled the affairs, both of God, and the ſtate; and now hath ſweet leiſure to enjoy himſelf and his people: his conſcience doth not more cheer him at home, than his ſubjects abroad; never king reigned with more officious piety to God, with more love and applauſe of men. But what ſtability is there in theſe earthly things! how ſeldom is excellency in any kind long-lived! In the very ſtrength of his age, in the height of his ſtrength, is *Joſiah* withdrawn from the earth; as not without a merciful intention of his glory on God's behalf, ſo not without ſome weakneſs on his own. *Pharaoh Necho* king of *Egypt* comes up to fight againſt the king of *Aſſyria*. What is that to *Joſiah?* Perhaps the *Egyptians* attempted to paſs through the land of *Judah* towards *Carchemiſh*, the ſeat of his war; but, as

as a neighbour, not as an enemy: *Joſiah* reſiſts him, as neither holding it ſafe to admit a foreign power into the boſom of his country, nor daring to give ſo fair an occaſion of provoking the *Aſſyrian* hoſtility againſt him.

The king of *Egypt* mildly deprecates this enmity; he ſends ambaſſadors to *Joſiah*, ſaying, *What have I to do with thee, thou king of* Judah? *I come not againſt thee this day, but againſt the houſe wherewith I have war; for God commanded me to make haſte: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that he deſtroy thee not.*

What friend could have ſaid more? what prophet could have adviſed more holily? Why doth not good *Joſiah* ſay with himſelf, There may be truth in this ſuggeſtion; God may have ſent this man to be a ſcourge of mine old enemy, of *Aſſur?* If the hand of the Almighty be in this deſign, why do I oppoſe it? the quarrel is not mine, why do I thruſt my finger into this flame, unbidden? wherefore ſhould I hazard the effuſion of blood upon an harmleſs paſſage? can I hear him plead a command from God, and not inquire into it? how eaſy is it for me to know the certainty of this pretended commiſſion? have not I the prieſts and prophets of God about me? let me firſt go and conſult his oracle; if God have ſent him, and forbidden me, why ſhould my courage carry me againſt my piety?

It is ſtrange, that the good heart of *Joſiah* could eſcape theſe thoughts, theſe reſolutions: yet he that, upon the general threats of God's law againſt *Judah*, ſends meſſengers to inquire of a propheteſs, now, upon theſe particular threats of danger to himſelf, ſpeaks not, ſtirs not. The famous prophet *Jeremiah* was then living, and *Zephaniah*, beſides a whole college of ſeers: *Joſiah* doth not ſo much as ſend out of doors to aſk, *Shall I go up againſt the king of* Egypt? Sometimes both grace and wit are aſleep

in the holieſt and warieſt breaſt: the beſt of all God's ſaints may be ſometimes miſcarried by their paſſions to their coſt.

The wiſe providence of God hath mercifully determined to leave *Joſiah* to his own counſels, that, by the weakneſs of his ſervant, he might take occaſion to perfect his glory. Even that, wherein *Joſiah* was wanting unto God, ſhall concur to the making up of God's promiſe to *Joſiah:* when we are the moſt blindfolded, we run on the ways of God's hidden decrees; and, whatever our intents be, cannot, if we would, go out of that unknown path.

Needs will *Joſiah* put himſelf into arms againſt an unwilling enemy; and, to be leſs noted, diſguiſes himſelf. The fatal arrow of an *Egyptian* archer finds him out in the throng, and gives him his death's wound; now, too late, he calls to a retreat; his changed chariot is turned to a bier to carry his bleeding corps to his grave in *Jeruſalem*.

What eye doth not now pity and lament the untimely end of a *Joſiah!* whom can it chuſe but affect, to ſee a religious, juſt, virtuous prince, ſnatcht away in the vigour of his age! After all our fooliſh moan, the Providence, that directed that ſhaft to his lighting place, intends that wound for a ſtroke of mercy. The God whom *Joſiah* ſerves looks through his death at his glory; and, by this ſudden violence, will deliver him from the view and participation of the miſeries of *Judah*, which had been many deaths, and fetches him to the participation of that happineſs, which could countervail more deaths than could be incident to a *Joſiah*. O the wonderful goodneſs of the Almighty, whoſe very judgments are merciful! O the ſafe condition of God's children, whom very pain eaſeth, whom death revives, whom diſſolution unites, whom, laſtly, their very ſin and temptation glorifies!

How

How happily hath *Joſiah* gained by this change! inſtead of a froward people, he now is ſorted with ſaints and angels; inſtead of a fading and corruptible crown, he now enjoys an eternal. The orphan ſubjects are ready to weep out their eyes for ſorrow; their loſs cannot be ſo great as his gain: he is glorious, they, as their ſins had deſerved, miſerable. If the ſeparated ſoul could be capable of paſſion, could *Joſiah* have ſeen, after his departure, the calamities of his ſons, of his people; it could not but have laid ſiege to his peace.

The ſad ſubjects proclaim his ſon *Jehoahaz* king, inſtead of ſo lamented a father; he both doth ill, and fares ill. By that time he hath ſat but three months in the throne, *Pharaoh Necho*, king of *Egypt*, ſeconds the father's death with the ſon's captivity. This enemy puts down the wicked ſon of *Joſiah*, and lades him with chains at *Riblath*, in the land at *Hamath*; and lades his people with a tribute of an hundred talents of ſilver, and a talent of gold: yet, as if he, that was unwilling to fight with *Joſiah*, were no leſs unwilling to root out his poſterity, this *Egyptian* ſets *Eliakim*, the ſecond ſon of *Joſiah*, upon the ſeat of his father; and, that he might be all his, changes his name to *Jehoiakim*. O the woful and unworthy ſucceſſion of *Joſiah!* one ſon is a priſoner, the other is a tributary, both are wicked. After that *Jehoiakim* hath been ſome years *Pharaoh*'s bailiff, to gather and rack the dear rents of *Judah*, *Nebuchadnezzar*, the great king of *Babylon*, comes up, and ſweeps away both the lord and his feodary, *Pharaoh* and *Jehoiakim*.

So far was the ambitious *Egyptian* from maintaining his encroachment upon the territories of *Judah*, that he could not now hold his own. From *Nilus* to *Euphrates* all is loſt: ſo ſubject are the leſſer powers ſtill to be ſwallowed up of the greater: ſo juſt it

is with God, that they, which will be affecting undue enlargement of their eſtates, ſhould fall ſhort of what they had.

Jehoiakim is carried in fetters to *Babylon;* and now, in that dungeon of his captivity, hath more leiſure than grace, to bethink himſelf of all his abominations; and, while he inherits the ſad lodging of his great grandfather *Manaſſeh*, inherits not his ſucceſs.

While he is rotting in this gaol, his young ſon *Jehoiakim* ſtarts up in his throne, like to a muſhrom that riſes up in a night, and withers in a day. Within three months and ten days is that young prince, the meet ſon of ſuch a father, fetched up in irons to his father's priſon; neither ſhall he go alone (his attendance ſhall add to his miſery) his mother, his wives, his officers, his peers, his craftſmen, his warriours accompany him, manacled and chained, to their perpetual bondage.

Now, according to *Iſaiah*'s word, it would have been great preferment for the fruit of *Hezekiah*'s loins to be pages in the court of *Babylon*.

One only branch yet remains of the unhappy ſtock of holy *Joſiah*, *Mattaniah*, the brother of *Jehoiakim*, whom *Nebuchadnezzar*, changing his name to *Zedekiah*, ſets up in that forlorn and tributary throne; there might he have lived, though an underling, yet peaceable: this man, to make up the meaſure of God's judgments, as he was ever a rebel to God, ſo proves rebellious to his ſovereign maſter, the king of *Babylon*. The prophet *Jeremiah* hath forewarned him in vain; nothing could teach this man but ſmart.

Who can look for other than fury from *Nebuchadnezzar* againſt *Jeruſalem*, which now had affronted him with three ſeveral ſucceſſions of revolts, and conſpiracies againſt his government; and thrice abuſed his bounty and indulgence! with a mighty army doth he therefore come up againſt his ſeditious deputy,

and

and beſieges *Jeruſalem*, and blocks it up with forts round about. After two years ſiege, the *Chaldees* without, and the famine within, have prevailed; king *Zedekiah* and his ſoldiers are fled away by night, as thinking themſelves happy, if they might abandon their walls, and ſave their lives.

The *Chaldees*, as caring more for the birds than for the neſt, purſue them, and overtake *Zedekiah*, forſaken of all his forces, in the plain of *Jericho*, and bring him to *Nebuchadnezzar* king of *Babylon*. What can ſo unthankful and perfidious a vaſſal expect, but the worſt of revenge? The ſentence is fearful: firſt, the ſons of *Zedekiah* are ſlain before his eyes; then thoſe eyes of his, as if they had ſeen enough, when they had ſeen him childleſs, are put out. His eyes are only lent him ſo long, as to torment him with the ſight of his own utmoſt diſcomfort; had his ſons but over-lided his eyes, the grief had been ſo much the leſs, as the apprehenſion of it had been leſs lively and piercing; now this woful object ſhall ſhut up his ſight, that even when his bodily eyes are gone, yet the eyes of his mind might ever ſee what he laſt ſaw; that thus his ſons might be ever dying before him, and himſelf in their death ever miſerable.

Who doth not now wiſh that the blood of *Hezekiah* and *Joſiah* could have been ſevered from theſe impure dregs of their lewd iſſue? no man could pity the offenders, were it not for the mixture of the intereſt of ſo holy progenitors.

No more ſorrow can come in at the windows of *Zedekiah*, more ſhall come in at his doors; his ear ſhall receive what more to rue for his *Jeruſalem*. *Nebuzaradan*, the great marſhal of the king of *Babylon*, comes up againſt that deplored city, and breaks down the walls of it round about, and burns the temple of the Lord, and the king's houſe, and every fair palace of *Jeruſalem*, with fire; drives away the remainder

of

of her inhabitants into captivity, carries away the laſt ſpoils of the glorious temple. O *Jeruſalem*, *Jeruſalem*, the wonder of all times, the paragon of nations, the glory of the earth, the favourite of heaven, how art thou now become heaps of aſhes, hills of rubbiſh, a ſpectacle of deſolation, a monument of ruin! If later, yet no leſs deep haſt thou now pledged that bitter cup of God's vengeance, to thy ſiſter *Samaria;* how carefully had thy God forewarned thee? Though *Iſrael* play the harlot, yet let not *Judah* ſin: lo now, as thine iniquities, ſo thy judgments have overtaken her. Both ly together in the duſt, both are made a curſe to all poſterities. O God, what place ſhall thy juſtice ſpare, if *Jeruſalem* have periſhed? if that delight of thine were cut off for her wickedneſs, *Let us not be high-minded, but fear.*

What pity it was to ſee thoſe goodly cedars of the temple flaming up higher than they ſtood in *Lebanon?* to ſee thoſe curious marbles, which never felt the dint of the pick-ax or hammer, in the laying, wounded with mattocks, and wounding the earth in their fall! to ſee the Holy of holies, whereinto none might enter but the high-prieſt once a year, thronged with Pagans; the vails rent, the ſacred ark of God violated and defaced, the tables overturned, the altars broken down, the pillars demoliſhed, the pavements digged up, yea the very ground, where that famous pile ſtood, deformed. O God, thou wouldſt rather have no viſible houſe upon earth, than endure it defiled with idolatries.

Four hundred thirty and ſix years had that temple ſtood, and beautified the earth, and honoured heaven, now it is turned into rude heaps. There is no preſcription to be pleaded for the favour of the Almighty: only that temple, not made with hands, is eternal in the heavens. Thither he graciouſly brings us, that hath ordained us thither, for the ſake of that glorious High-

High-prieſt, that hath once for all entered into that holy of holies. *Amen.*

BOOK TWENTY-FIRST.

CONTEM. I. ZERUBBABEL *and* EZRA.

THE firſt tranſportation into *Babylon*, under *Jehoiakim*, wherein *Daniel*, *Ezekiel*, and many others of the beſt note, were driven into captivity, was, ſome eleven years after, followed with a ſecond, under *Zedekiah*, wherein the remnant of the now ruined *Jeruſalem* and *Judah* were ſwept away. Seventy years was the period of their longeſt ſervitude: while *Babylon* was a queen, *Judah* was her vaſſal. When that proud tyranneſs fell, God's people began to riſe again. The *Babylonian* monarchy was no ſooner ſwallowed up of the *Perſian*, than the *Jews* felt the comfort of liberty.

For *Cyrus*, conquering *Babylon*, and finding the *Jews* groaning under that captivity, ſtraight releaſes them, and ſends them, under the conduct of their captain *Zerubbabel*, back to their almoſt forgotten country.

The world ſtands upon viciſſitudes: every nation hath her turn, and muſt make up her meaſure. Threeſcore and ten years ago, it was the courſe of *Judah*, the iniquity of that rebellious people was full. Some hundred and thirty years before that, was the turn of *Samaria*, and her *Iſraelites:* now the ſtaff is come to the doors of *Babylon*, even that wherewith *Judah* was beaten; and thoſe *Perſians*, which are now victorious, muſt have their term alſo. It is in vain for any earthly ſtate to promiſe to itſelf an immutable condition. At laſt, the rod that ſcourged God's children is caſt into the fire. *Thou haſt remembered, O Lord, the children of* Edom, *in the day of* Jeruſalem, *how they ſaid,*

ſaid, Down with it, down with it, even to the ground. O daughter of Babylon, *waſted with miſery, how happy is he that rewardeth thee as thou haſt ſerved them.* It is *Cyrus* that hath wrought this revenge, this reſcue.

Doubtleſs, it did not a little move *Cyrus* to this favour, that he found himſelf honourably forenamed in theſe *Jewiſh* propheſies, and foreappointed to this glorious ſervice, no leſs than an hundred and ſeventy years before he was. Who would not be glad to make good ſo noble and happy a deſtiny? O God, if we hear that thou haſt ordained us to life, how gladly, how carefully ſhould we work out our ſalvation? if to good works, how ſhould we abound?

In the firſt year of his monarchy, doth *Cyrus* both make proclamations, and publiſh them in writing, through all his kingdom, wherein he both profeſſeth his zealous reſolutions, and deſires to build up God's houſe in *Jeruſalem*, and enjoins and encourages all the *Jews*, through his dominions, to addreſs themſelves to that ſacred work; and incites all his ſubjects to aid them with ſilver, and gold, and goods, and beaſts. How gracious was the command of that, whereof the very allowance was a favour!

Was it *Cyrus* that did this? was it not thou, O God, in whoſe hands are the hearts of kings, that ſtirredſt up the ſpirit of that *Perſian*, as if he had been more than a ſon of thy church, a father? How eaſy is it for thee to make very Pagans protectors to thy church; enemies, benefactors?

Not with an empty grace doth this great king diſmiſs the *Jews*, but with a royal bounty; *He brings forth the veſſels of the houſe of the Lord, which* Nebuchadnezzar *had brought forth out of* Jeruſalem, *and had put them in the houſe of his gods, and cauſes them to be numbered by his treaſurer to the hands of* Sheſhbazzar *the prince of* Judah, *for the uſe of the temple; no fewer*

fewer than five thouſand and four hundred veſſels of gold and ſilver.

Certainly, this great monarch wanted not wit to think, It is a rich booty that I find in the temples of *Babylon*; by the law of conqueſt it is mine; having vanquiſhed their gods, I may well challenge their ſpoil: how ſeaſonably doth it now fall into my hands, upon this victory, to reward my ſoldiers, to ſettle my new empire! What if this treaſure came from *Jeruſalem;* the propriety is now altered, the very place, according to the conceit of the *Jews*, hath profaned it. The true God, I have heard, is curious, neither will abide thoſe veſſels, which have been polluted with idolatrous uſes: it ſhall be enough, if I looſe the bonds of this miſerable people: if I give liberty, let the next give wealth. They will think themſelves happy in bare walls, in their native earth. To what purpoſe ſhould I pamper their penury with a ſudden ſtore?—But the princely heart of *Cyrus* would admit of no ſuch baſe ſacrilegious thoughts. Thoſe veſſels that he finds ſtamped with God's mark, he will return to their owner; neither his own occaſions, nor their abuſe, ſhall be any colour of their detention. O *Cyrus*, how many cloſe-handed, gripple-minded chriſtians ſhall once be choked in judgment, with the example of thy juſt munificence! thou reſtoredſt that which we purloin. Wo be to thoſe houſes that are ſtored with the ſpoils of God's temple: wo be to thoſe fingers that are tainted with holy treaſures.

Kings can hardly do good alone; their laws are not more followed, than their examples. No ſooner do the chief of the fathers of *Judah* and *Benjamin*, and the prieſts and *Levites*, ſet their faces towards *Jeruſalem* for the building of the temple, than the liberal hands of their Pagan neighbours furniſh them with gold and ſilver, and precious things. Every *Perſian* is glad to be at the charge of laying a ſtone in God's

houſe. The ſame God, that had given them theſe metals out of his coffers of the earth, gives it out of their coffers to his temple. He that took away by the *Chaldees*, gives by the *Perſians*. Where the Almighty intends a work, there cannot be any want of means.

Thus heartened, thus laded, do the joyful families of *Judah* return to their old home. How many thouſands of them were worn out, and loſt in that ſeventy years ſervitude! how few of them yet ſurvived, that could know the place of their birth and habitation, or ſay, Here ſtood the temple, here the palace! Amongſt thoſe forty and two thouſand three hundred and threeſcore *Jews* that returned in this firſt expedition, there were whom the confuſion of their long captivity had robbed of their pedigree: they knew themſelves *Jews*, but could not derive their line; theſe were yet admitted without difficulty: but thoſe of the prieſtly tribe, which could not deduce their genealogy from the regiſter, are caſhiered as unclean: then, God would be ſerved in a blood; now, in a due ſucceſſion. If we could not fetch the line of our pedigree from Chriſt and his apoſtles, we were not fit for the evangelical altars. Their calling was by nature, ours by grace: the graee of inward abilities, of outward ordination; if we cannot approve both theſe, we are juſtly abandoned. Now had the children of *Iſrael* taken down their harps from the willows which grew by the waters of *Babylon*, and could, unbidden, ſing the true ſongs of their recovered *Sion:* they are newly ſettled in their old manſions, when, upon the firſt public feaſt, in the autumn immediately following their return, they flock up to *Jeruſalem:* their firſt care is their public ſacrifice; that ſchool of their captivity, wherein they have been long trained, hath taught them to begin with God. A forced diſcontinance makes devotion more ſavoury,

ry, more ſweet to religious hearts; whereas, in an open freedom, piety doth too often languiſh.

Joſhua the prieſt, and *Zerubbabel* the prince, are fitly joined in the building of the altar: neither of their hands may be out of that ſacred work. No ſooner is that ſet upon the baſis, than it is employed to the daily burnt-offerings: the altar may not ſtay the leiſure of the temple; God's church may not want her oblations. He can be none of the ſons of *Iſrael*, that doth not every day renew his acknowledgments of God.

How feelingly do theſe *Jews* keep their feaſt of tabernacles, while their ſojourning in *Babylon* was ſtill in their thoughts, while as yet their tents muſt ſupply their ruined houſes! The firſt motions of zeal are commonly ſtrong and fervent: how carefully do theſe governors and prieſts make preparation for God's temple! carpenters and maſons are hired; *Tyrian* workmen are again called for, and *Lebanon* is now anew ſolicited for cedar trees. The materials are ready; every *Iſraelite* with ſuch courage addreſſes himſelf to this ſervice, as if his life lay in thoſe ſtones: and now, while the foundation of the temple was laying, the prieſts ſtand in their habits, with trumpets, the *Levites* with cymbals, interchanging their holy muſic, and melodiouſly ſinging praiſes to the God of *Iſrael*, who had turned their captivity as the ſtreams in the ſouth, and honoured their eyes and their hands with the firſt ſtones of his houſe. The people ſecond their ſongs with ſhouts; the earth ſounds, and heaven rings with the joyful acclamations of the multitude. It is no ſmall comfort, in a good action, to have begun well. The entrance of any holy enterpriſe is commonly encountered with many diſcouragements, which if we have once overcome, the paſſage is ſmooth.

How would theſe men have ſhouted at the laying on of the laſt ſtone of the battlements, who are thus joyed with laying the firſt ſtones of the foundation! The end of any thing is better than the beginning; that hath certainty, this danger; this labour, that reſt: little did theſe men think, that, for all this, few of them ſhould live to ſee the roof.

What different affections ſhall we ſee produced in men by the ſame occaſion? the younger *Jews* ſhouted at this ſight, the elder wept: the younger ſhouted to ſee a new foundation, the elder wept to remember the old: they who had ſeen no better, thought this goodly; they who had ſeen the former thought this mean and homely; more ſorrowing for what they loſt, than rejoicing in ſo unequal a reparation.

As it may fall out, it is ſome piece of miſery to have been happier; every abatement of the degrees of our former height lays ſiege to our thankfulneſs for leſſer mercies. Sometimes it proves an advantage to have known no better; he ſhall more comfortably enjoy preſent benefits, who takes them as they are, without any other compariſons, than of the weakneſs of his own deſervings. It is nothing to me what myſelf or others have been, ſo I be now well. Neither is it otherways in particular churches; if one be more glorioufly built than another, yet if the foundation be rightly laid in both, one may not inſult, the other may not repine; each muſt congratulate the truth to other, each muſt thankfully enjoy itſelf.

The noiſe was not more loud, than confuſed; here was a diſcordant mixture of lamentation and ſhouting; it was hard to ſay whether drowned the other.

This aſſembly of *Jews* was a true image of God's church on earth; one ſings, another cries; never doth it all either laugh or mourn at once. It ſhall be in our triumph, that all tears ſhall be wiped from our eyes;

eyes; till then, our paſſions muſt be mixed, according to the occaſions.

The *Jews* are buſy at work, not more full of joy than hopes; and now that the walls begin to overlook the earth, their thoughts ſeem to overlook the walls. But what great enterpriſe was ever ſet on foot for God, which found not ſome croſſes?

There was a mongrel brood of *Samaria-Aſſyrians*, which, ever ſince the days of *Sennacherib*, dwelt in the land of *Iſrael*, whoſe religion was a patched coat of ſeveral ſhreds; ſome little part *Jewiſh*, the reſt Pagan, not without much variety of idolatry. Theſe hollow neighbours proffer their aſſiſtance to the children of the captivity; *Let us build with you, for we ſeek your God, as ye do, and do ſacrifice to him.* Might men be their own judges, there would be no hereſy in the world, no miſ-worſhip. It is true, theſe men did ſacrifice to the true God; the lions taught them to ſeek, and the *Iſraelitiſh* prieſts taught them to find, the faſhions of the God of the land. Some of theſe *Jews* knew their devotion of old; they ſerved *Iſrael*'s God, but with their own: as good no God as too many. In a juſt indignation, therefore, do theſe *Jewiſh* governors repel the partnerſhip of ſuch helpers; *You have nothing to do with us, to build an houſe to our God; but we ourſelves together will build unto the Lord God of* Iſrael. The hand of an idolater is contagious; yet had it been to the building of ſome fortreſs, or common-hall, perhaps their aid had not been refuſed; but, when the walls of God's houſe are to be raiſed, this ſociety had been piacular.

Thoſe, that may not be allowed to help the work, will aſk no leave to hinder it; their malicious ſuggeſtions weaken the hands of the people of *Judah*, and ſtir up authority to ſuppreſs them.

Cyrus

Cyrus was far off, neither lived he long after that gracious commiſſion, and, beſides, was ſo taken up the while with his wars, that he could not have leiſure to ſift thoſe querelous accuſations. Now therefore, during the laſt years of *Cyrus*, and the reign of his ſon *Cambyſes*, and the long government of *Darius Hyſtaſpes*, and of his ſon *Xerxes*, or *Ahaſuerus*, and laſtly of his ſon *Artaxerxes*, until the days of *Darius Nothus*, (which was no leſs than five ſucceſſions of kings, beſides *Cyrus*), do the walls of the temple ſtand ſtill, yea ly waſte, ſubject to the wrongs of time and weather, the fit matter of ſorrow to the *Jews*, inſultation to the enemies, deriſion to paſſengers.

What a wide gap of time was here, betwixt the foundation of God's houſe and the battlements! how large a trial doth God now ſecondly take of the faith, of the patience of his people! how large a proof doth he give of his own long-ſuffering! O God, when thou hadſt but one houſe upon earth, thou wert content to put up delays, yea affronts, in the building of it: now thou haſt many, it is no marvel if thy longanimity and juſtice abide ſome of them to ly deſolate! They are not ſtones, or metals, or men, that can make thee more glorious; thou beſt knoweſt when to ſerve thyſelf of all theſe, when to honour theſe with thy ſervice.

A ſmall matter hinders the worthieſt action; as a little fiſh, they ſay, ſtays the greateſt ſhip. Before the *Jews* were diſcouraged with words, but now they are ſtopped with commands.

Theſe envious *Samaritans* have corrupted the governors which the *Perſian* kings ſet over thoſe parts, and from their hands have obtained letters of deep calumniation, to *Ahaſuerus* the king, and after him to his ſon *Artaxerxes*, wherein *Jeruſalem* is charged with old rebellion to kings, and for proof, appellation

lation is made to the records; from which evidence is ſpitefully inferred, that if theſe walls be once built, the king ſhall receive no tribute on this ſide the river. Never was God's church but ſubject to reproaches.

Princes have reaſon to be jealous of their rights. The records are ſearched; it ſoon appears, that, within one century of years, *Jeruſalem* had rebelled againſt *Nebuchadnezzar*, and held out two years ſiege of that great *Babylonian*. The ſcandal of diſloyalty is perpetual: although indeed they held him rather a prevailing enemy, than a lawful ſovereign; one act diſparages either place or perſon, to all poſterities. Therefore ſhall the walls of *Jeruſalem* ly waſte, becauſe it had once been treacherous: after an hundred years doth that city rue one perfidious act of *Zedekiah*. Fidelity to our governors is ever both ſafe and honourable.

Command is now ſent out from *Artaxerxes*, even the ſon of queen *Eſther*, to reſtrain the work. All reſpects muſt ceaſe with carnal minds, when their honours and profits are in queſtion. *Rehum* the chancellor, and *Shimſhai* the ſcribe, come now armed with authority: the ſword hath eaſily prevailed againſt the trowel. Still do the *Jews* find themſelves, as it were, captives at home; and in ſilence, and ſorrow, ceaſe from their labours, until the days of the next ſucceſſor, *Darius Nothus*.

As thoſe that had learned to ſow after a bad crop; theſe *Jews*, upon the change of the prince, by the encouragement of the prophets of God, *Haggai* and *Zechariah*, take new heart to build again. If others power hinder us in the work of God, our will may not be guilty.

Their new governors come, as before, to expoſtulate: *Who hath commanded you to build this houſe, and to make up this wall? and what are your names?* They wiſely and modeſtly plead the ſervice of the God

God of heaven, the decree of *Cyrus*; ſtill perſiſting to build, as if the prohibition of *Artaxerxes* had died with the author. The impartial governors do neither claw nor exaſperate, but, relating the humble and juſt anſwer of the *Jews*, move the king, that ſearch may be made in the rolls of *Babylon*, whether ſuch an edict were made by *Cyrus*, and require his royal pleaſure, concerning the validity of ſuch a pretended decree. *Darius* ſearches, finds, ratifies, enlargeth it, not only charging his officers not to hinder the work, but commanding to levy ſums of his own tribute, beyond the river, for the expences of the building, for the furniſhing of ſacrifices, threatening utter ruin to the houſe of that man, and death to his perſon, who ſhould offer to impeach this bounty; and ſhutting up with a zealous imprecation, *The God of heaven, that hath cauſed his name to dwell there, deſtroy all kings and people that ſhall put to their hand to alter, and to deſtroy this houſe of God which is at* Jeruſalem: *I* Darius *have made a decree, let it be done with ſpeed.*

Who could have looked for ſuch an edict from a *Perſian?* No *Solomon*, no *David* could have ſaid more.

The ruler of all hearts makes choice of his own inſtruments, and, when he pleaſeth, can glorify himſelf by thoſe means which are leaſt expected. That ſacred work, which the huſband and ſon of an *Eſther* croſſed, ſhall be happily accompliſhed by a *Darius*. In the ſixth year of his reign is the temple of God fully finiſhed; and now the dedication of it is celebrated by a joyful feaſt: an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, in a meet proportion, ſmoke upon their altars. And now the children of the captivity think this day a ſufficient payment for all their ſorrows: we have reaſon to think it the faireſt day that ever ſhone forth to us, wherein the

the ſpiritual building of God's houſe is raiſed up in our ſouls. How ſhould we ſhout at the laying of this foundation, and feaſt at the laying on of the roof! What other, what better ſacrifice can we offer up to God in the ſenſe of our joy, than ourſelves? Let our hearts be at once the temple, the altar, the ſacrifice. O God, be thou glorified in all theſe, who haſt graciouſly honoured all theſe with thyſelf.

Every holy feaſt is now duly kept, the prieſts know their diviſions, the *Levites* their courſes, and the whole ſervice of God is put into a ſettled order; but, as there can be no new beginnings without imperfection, nor long continuance without corruption, reformation is no leſs neceſſary than good inſtitutions. *Artaxerxes Mnemon* had learned of his father *Darius* to befriend God's people, and ſtrives to inherit his beneficence: under his government is *Ezra* the prieſt, and learned ſcribe, ſent with a large commiſſion from *Babylon* to *Jeruſalem*, to enquire into the wants, and redreſs the diſorders of the *Jews*, with full power, not only to carry with him all the voluntaries of his nation, and the treaſures contributed in all the province of *Babylon*, but to raiſe ſuch ſums out of the king's revenues, as ſhould be found requiſite; and, withal, to ordain magiſtrates and judges, and to crown the laws with due execution, whether to death or baniſhment, or to confiſcation; and, laſtly, with a large exemption of the prieſts and *Levites*, and all the inferior officers of the temple, from all tolls, tributes, cuſtoms. Nothing wanted here, whether for direction or encouragement. It is a ſign of God's great favour to any nation, when the hearts of ſovereign governors are raiſed up, both to the choice of worthy agents, and to the commanding of pious and reſtorative actions.

Holy and careful *Ezra* gathers a new colony of *Jews*, takes view of them at the river of *Ahava*;

and finding a miſs of the ſons of *Levi*, (without whom no company, no plantation can be complete) ſends for their ſupply, and, now fully furniſhed, he proclaims a faſt in the way.

I do not hear him ſay, The journey is long and dangerous; the people have need of all their ſtrength. I could well wiſh us all afflicted with a religious faſt, were it not that the abatement of the courage, and vigour of the multitude, may endanger our ſucceſs: but, without all theſe carnal conſultations, he begins with this ſolemn act of humiliation, It is better to have God ſtrong in our weakneſs, than to have fleſh and blood ſtrong in his neglect.

Artaxerxes was a patron of the *Jews*, yet a Pagan by profeſſion; wiſe *Ezra* was afraid of quenching thoſe ſparks of piety, which he deſcried in this ſemi-proſelyte. Rather therefore than he will ſeem to imply a diſtruſt in the providence of that God, in whoſe ſervice he went, by ſeeking a convoy of ſoldiers from the king, *Ezra* chuſes to put himſelf upon the hazard of the way, and the immediate protection of the Almighty. Any death were better than to hear *Artaxerxes* ſay, Is this the man that ſo confidently told me, *The hand of our God is upon all them for good that ſeek him; but his power and his wrath is againſt all them that forſake him?* Doth he believe himſelf, that he thus doubts ere he begin? Dare he not truſt his God with his own buſineſſes?

The reſolutions of faithful hearts are heroical. No heathen man ſhall ſtumble at *Ezra*'s fear: he can find no more aſſurance in his faſt, than in a *Perſian* band: with a couragious reliance upon the hand of his God, he puts himſelf into the journey, and finds nothing but ſafety and ſucceſs. The fidelity of the Almighty never diſappointed the confidence of his ſervants. All the army of *Artaxerxes* could not have been ſo ſtrong a guard to the *Jews*, as their inviſible protection.

In

In the ſpace of four months is *Ezra* and his company happily arrived at *Jeruſalem*, where he joys to ſee the new temple, and his old colleagues: and now, having delivered up the charge of his treaſure, by weight, in the chambers of the houſe of the Lord, he applies himſelf to his work, and delivers the king's commiſſions to the lieutenants and governors, for their utmoſt aſſiſtance.

The princes of *Judah* do not, for ought I hear, repine at the large patent granted to this prieſt, nor ſay, What doth a man of this robe meddle with placing, or diſplacing magiſtrates, with executions of judgments to death, bonds, baniſhments? but rather, as congratulating this power to ſacred hands, gladly preſent unto him all their grievances. Truly religious hearts cannot grudge any honour to their ſpiritual guides.

This holy commiſſioner is ſoon welcomed with a ſad bill of complaint, from ſome good peers of *Iſrael;* wherein they charge divers of the prieſts, *Levites*, people, not to have ſeparated themſelves from the idolatrous inhabitants of the lands, nor therefore from their abominations, even from *Canaanites*, *Hittites*, *Perizzites*, and the reſt of thoſe branded nations; that they have taken of their daughters for themſelves, and for their ſons, ſo that the holy ſeed have mingled themſelves with thoſe forbidden people; and, which made the matter ſo much more heinous, leſs remediable, that the *hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this treſpaſs.*

O hypocritical *Jews*, did ye refuſe to ſuffer your *Samaritan* neighbours to join with you in building a lifeleſs houſe unto God, and do ye now join affinity with a more accurſed generation for the building of living houſes unto poſterity, for the pulling down of the lively houſe of God?

How could *Ezra* hear this with his clothes, his hair, his beard untorn! What grief, what aſtoniſhment muſt

this news needs bring to a zealous heart! And, were it not that the conſcience of his ſincere reſpect of God's glory relieved him, how could *Ezra* chuſe but repent him of his journey, and ſay, Am I come from *Babylon* to find Paganiſm in *Judah?* did I leave *Perſians* to meet with *Canaanites?* what do I hear, if *Jeruſalem* be removed? how much better were a clear captivity, than an idolatrous freedom? Wo is me, that having left many *Jewiſh* hearts in *Babylon*, I now am forced to find Heathen blood in *Jeruſalem!*

As a man diſtracted with ſorrow, *Ezra* ſits down upon the earth with his garments rent, with the hair of his head and beard pluckt off, wringing his hands, knocking his breaſt, not moving from his place until the evening ſacrifice. It is hard to be too much affected with the public ſins of God's people. Thoſe who find themſelves in the ſhip of God's church, cannot but be much troubled with every dangerous leak that it takes. Common caſes are not more neglected by the careleſs, than taken to heart by the wiſe and godly.

There, and thus, *Ezra* ſits aſtoniſhed until the evenning ſacrifice: others reſorted to him the while, even all that trembled at the words of the God of *Iſrael;* but to help on his ſorrow, not to relieve; neither doth any man wiſh a mitigation of his own, or others grief. At laſt he riſes up from his heavineſs, and caſts himſelf upon his knees, and ſpreads out his hands unto the Lord his God. Wherefore was all that penſiveneſs, faſting, ſilence, tearing of hair and clothes, but to ſerve as a meet preface to his prayers? wherein he ſo freely pours out his heart, as if it had been all diſſolved into devotion; profeſſing his ſhame to lift up his face towards the throne of God; confeſſing the iniquities of his people, which were increaſed over their heads, and grown up unto heaven; fetching their treſpaſs far, and charging them deep; feelingly acknowledging the juſt hand that had followed them in all

their

their judgments, and the juſt confuſion wherein they now ſtand before the face of their God.

Tears and ſighs, and grovellings, accompanied his prayers; the example and noiſe whereof drew *Iſrael* into a participation of this public mourning; *for the people wept very ſore.* How can they chuſe but think, If he thus lament for us, how ſhould we grieve for ourſelves!

All *Judah* went away merrily with their ſin, till this check of *Ezra;* now they are afflicted. Had not the hands of the peers been in this treſpaſs, the people had not been guilty; had not the cheeks of *Ezra* been firſt drenched with tears, the people had not been penitent. It cannot be ſpoken what power there is in a great example, whether to evil or good.

Prayers and tears are nothing without endeavours. *Shecaniah*, the ſon of *Jehiel*, puts the firſt life into this buſineſs. Having ſeconded the complaint of *Ezra*, he now adds, *Yet there is hope in* Iſrael *concerning this thing; now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and ſuch as are born of them: ariſe, for this matter belongeth to thee, we alſo will be with thee; be of good courage, and do it.*

When miſchief is once done, the chief care is, how to redreſs it. The beſt way of redreſs, is the deliberate undoing of that which we have raſhly committed. The ſureſt obligation to the undoing of an evil act, is an oath or covenant made with God, for the performance.

There is no man ſo wiſe, but he may make uſe of good counſel; there is no man ſo forward, but he may abide incitation. It is no ſmall encouragement, to ſee an hearty aſſiſtance in an envious and difficult ſervice. *Then aroſe* Ezra, *and made the chief prieſts, the* Levites, *and all* Iſrael, *to ſwear that they ſhould do according to this word.*

It

It is half done that is thus assured. There was need of a strong power to dissolve a matrimonial, though inordinate love. Doubtless, these men had married out of affection; their hearts were no less set upon these wives, though heathenish, than if they had been of their own tribes; neither were their children, thus begotten, less dear unto them, than if they had lain in *Jewish* wombs. Nothing less than an oath of God therefore could quiet these passions; that is both required and taken.

Now begins *Ezra* to conceive some hope of present redress; the comfort whereof yet cannot turn off his sorrow for the offence passed. He neither eats bread nor drinks water, willingly punishing himself, because *Israel* had sinned. Now shall his countrymen easily read in his face their own penance, and just humiliation, and say, This man takes no joy in our sufferings; he would not smart thus for us, if he did not descry more danger towards us than we can apprehend.

Proclamation is made through *Judah* and *Jerusalem*, under pain of forfeiture of substance, and excommunication from God's people, that all the children of the captivity should gather themselves together unto *Jerusalem*. They are met accordingly; the courts of God's house are thronged with penitents, and now, as if the heavens would teach them what to do, the clouds rain down abundance of tears. What with those sad showers, what with their inward remorse, the people sit trembling in the open courts, and humbly wait for the reproof, for the sentence of *Ezra*. He rises up, and, with a severe countenance, lays before them their sin, their amends; the sin of their strange wives, the amends of their confession, of their separation; not sparing to search their wound, nor neglecting the meet plaister for their cure.

The

The people, as willing to be healed, yield themſelves patiently to that rough hand, not ſhrinking at the pain, nor favouring the ſore; *As thou haſt ſaid, ſo muſt we do:* only craving a fit proportion of time, and a due aſſiſtance for the diſpatch of ſo long and important a work. *Ezra* gladly hearkens to this, not ſo much requeſt, as counſel of *Iſrael*. The charge is divided to men and days; for two months ſpace the commiſſioners ſit cloſe, and within that compaſs finiſh this buſineſs, not more thankleſs than neceſſary. Doubtleſs much variety of paſſion met with them in this buſy ſervice. Here you ſhould have ſeen an affectionate huſband bitterly weeping at the diſmiſſion of a loving wife, and drowning his laſt farewel in ſobs. There you might have ſeen a paſſionate wife, hanging upon the arms of her beloved huſband; and on her knees conjuring him by her former vows, and the dear pledges of their loves, and proffering, with many tears, to redeem the loſs of her huſband with the change of her religion. Here you might have ſeen the kindred and parents of the diſmiſſed, ſhutting up their denied ſuits with rage and threats; there the abandoned children kneeling to their ſeemingly cruel father, beſeeching him not to caſt off the fruit of his own loins, and expoſtulating what they have offended in being his. The reſolved *Iſraelites* muſt be deaf, or blind to theſe moving objects, and ſo far forget nature, as to put off part of themſelves. Perſonal inconveniences have reaſon to yield to public miſchiefs: long entertainment makes that ſin hard to be ejected, whoſe firſt motions might have been repelled with eaſe.

Had not the prohibition of theſe marriages been expreſs, and their danger and miſchief palpable, the care of their ſeparation had not bred ſo much tumult in *Iſrael*. He, that ordained matrimony, had upon fearful curſes forbidden an unequal yoke with infidels.

Beſides

Beſides the marring of the church by the mixture of an unholy ſeed, religion ſuffered for the preſent, and all good hearts with it. Many tears, many ſacrifices, need to expiate ſo foul an offence, and to ſet *Iſrael* ſtraight again.

All this while even theſe miſ-line *Jews* were yet forward to build the temple. The worſt ſinners may yield an outward conformity to actions of piety. *Ezra* hath done more ſervice in pulling down, than the *Jews* in building; without this act, the temple might have ſtood, religion muſt needs have fallen: *Babel* had been tranſlated to *Jeruſalem*, *Jews* had turned *Gentiles*. O happy endeavours of devout and holy *Ezra*, that hath at once reſtored *Judah* to God, and to itſelf!

CONTEM. II. NEHEMIAH *building the walls of Jeruſalem.*

THirteen years were now paſſed ſince *Ezra*'s going up to *Jeruſalem*, when *Nehemiah*, the religious courtier of *Artaxerxes*, inquires of the eſtate of his country, and brethren of *Judea:* he might well find that holy ſcribe had not been idle. The commiſſion of *Artaxerxes* had been improved by him to the utmoſt. Diſorders were reformed, but the walls lay waſte: the temple was built, but the city was ruinous; and if ſome ſtreets were repaired, yet they ſtood unguarded, open to the mercy of an enemy, to the infeſtation of ill neighbourhood. Great bodies muſt have ſlow motions: as *Jeruſalem*, ſo the church of God, whoſe type it was, muſt be finiſhed by leiſure.

Nehemiah ſat warm in the court at *Shuſhan*, favoured by the great king *Artaxerxes;* nothing could be wanting to him, whether for pleaſure or ſtate: what needed he to trouble his head with thoughts for *Jeruſalem?*

Jeruſalem? what if thoſe remote walls lay on heaps while himſelf dwelt fair? what if his far diſtant countrymen be deſpiſed, while himſelf is honoured by the great monarch of the world?

It is not ſo eaſy for gracious diſpoſitions to turn off the public calamities of God's church: neither can they do other than loſe their private felicities, in the common diſtreſſes of the univerſal body. *If I forget thee, O* Jeruſalem, *let my right-hand forget her cunning: if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.*

Many *Jews* went up from *Babylon* and *Shuſhan* to *Jeruſalem*, few ever returned voluntarily from their native home to the region of their captivity. Some occaſion drew *Hanani*, with certain others of *Judah*, to this voyage. Of them doth *Nehemiah* carefully inquire the preſent condition of *Jeruſalem*. It was no news, that the people were afflicted and reproached, the walls broken down, the gates burnt with fire. Ever ſince the furious vaſtation of *Nebuzaradan*, that city knew not better terms. Seldom doth the ſpiritual *Jeruſalem* fare otherways, in reſpect of outward eſtate. External glory and magnificence is an unſure note of the church.

Well had *Nehemiah* hoped, that the gracious edict and beneficence of *Darius*, and the ſucceſſive patronage of his lord *Artaxerxes*, had, by the continuance of twenty years favour, advanced the ſtrength and glory of *Jeruſalem*: but now, finding the holy city to ly ſtill in the duſt of her confuſion, neglected of God, deſpiſed of men, he ſits down and weeps, and mourns, and faſts, and prays to the God of heaven. How many ſaw thoſe ruins, and were little affected! he hears of them afar off, and is thus paſſionate. How many were, upon this ſight, affected with a fruitleſs ſorrow! his mourning is joined with the endeavours

of redreſs. In vain is that grief, which hath no other end than itſelf.

Nehemiah is reſolved to kneel to the king his maſter, for the repair of his *Jeruſalem:* he dares not attempt the ſuit till he have begun with God. This good courtier knew well, that the hearts of theſe earthly kings are in the over-ruling hand of the King of heaven, to incline whither he pleaſeth. Our prayers are the only true means to make way for our ſucceſs. If in all our occaſions we do not begin with the firſt mover, the courſe is prepoſterous, and commonly ſpeeds accordingly.

Who dares cenſure the piety of courtiers, when he finds *Nehemiah* ſtanding before *Artaxerxes?* even the *Perſian* palace is not incapable of a ſaint. No man, that waits on the altar at *Jeruſalem*, can compare for zeal with him, that waits on the cup of a Pagan monarch. The mercies of God are unlimited to places, to callings.

Thus armed with devotions, doth *Nehemiah* put himſelf into the preſence of his maſter *Artaxerxes*. His face was overclouded with a deep ſadneſs, neither was he willing to clear it. The king eaſily notes the diſparity of the countenance of the bearer, and the wine that he bears; and, in a gracious familiarity, aſks the reaſon of ſuch unwonted change. How well it becomes the great to ſtoop unto a courteous affability, and to exchange words of reſpect, even with their humble vaſſals!

Nehemiah had not been ſo long in the court, but he knew that princes like no other than cheerful attendants; neither was he wont to bring any other face into that preſence, than ſmooth and ſmiling.

Greatneſs uſes to be full of ſuſpicion, and, where it ſees a dejection and ſourneſs of the brows, is ready to apprehend ſome ſullen thoughts of diſcontentment, or, at the leaſt, conſtrues it for a diſreſpect to that ſove-

reignty,

reignty, whoſe beams ſhould be of power to diſperſe all our inward miſts. Even good manners forbid a man to preſs into the preſence of a prince, except he can either lay by theſe unpleaſing paſſions, or hide them: ſo had *Nehemiah* hitherto done. Now, he purpoſely ſuffers his ſorrow to look through his eyes, that it may work both inquiry and compaſſion from his maſter; neither doth he fail of his hopes in either: *Why is thy countenance ſad, ſeeing thou art not ſick?* How ſenſible do we think the Father of mercies is of all our penſive thoughts, when an Heathen maſter is ſo tender of a ſervant's grief! How ready ſhould our tongues be to lay open our cares to the God of all comfort, when we ſee *Nehemiah* ſo quick in the expreſſions of his ſorrow to an uncertain ear! *Let the king live for ever: why ſhould not my countenance be ſad, when the city, the place of my father's ſepulchres, lyeth waſte, and the gates thereof burnt with fire?* Not without an humble preface doth *Nehemiah* lay forth his grievance; complaints have ever an unpleaſing harſhneſs in them, which muſt be taken off by ſome diſcreet inſinuation: although it could not but ſound well in the generous ear of *Artaxerxes*, that his ſervant was ſo careful for the honour of his country. As nature hath made us all members of a community, and hath given us common intereſts, ſo it is moſt pleaſing to us, to ſee theſe public cares divide us from our own.

The king eaſily deſcries a ſecret ſupplication wraped up in this moanful anſwer, which the modeſt ſuitor was afraid to diſcloſe; and therefore he helps that baſhful motion into the light: *For what doſt thou make requeſt?* It is the praiſe of bounty to draw on the juſt petitions of fearful ſupplicants.

Nehemiah dares not open his mouth to the king, till his heart hath opened itſelf by a ſudden ejaculation to his God: no buſineſs can be ſo haſty, but our

prayer may prevent it; the wings whereof are ſo nimble, that it can fly up to heaven, and ſolicit God, and bring down an anſwer, before ever our words need to come forth of our lips. In vain ſhall we hope that any deſign of ours can proſper, if we have not firſt ſent this meſſenger on our errand.

After this ſilent and inſenſible preparation, *Nehemiah* moves his ſuit to the king, not yet at once, but by meet degrees; firſt he craves leave for his journey, and for building, then he craves aid for both; both are granted. *Nehemiah* departs furniſhed with letters to the governors for a convoy, with letters to the keeper of the king's foreſt with timber, not more full of deſire than hope.

Whoever put his hand to any great work for the behoof of God's church, without oppoſition? As the walls of the temple found buſy enemies, ſo ſhall the walls of the city; and theſe ſo much more, as they promiſe more ſecurity and ſtrength to *Jeruſalem*. *Sanballat* the depury-lieutenant of the *Moabites*, and *Tobiah* the like officer to the *Ammonites*, and *Geſhem* to the *Arabians*, are galled with envy at the arrival of a man authorized to ſeek the welfare of the children of *Iſrael*. There cannot be a greater vexation to wicked hearts, than to ſee the ſpiritual *Jeruſalem* in any likelihood of proſperity. Evil ſpirits and men need no other torment than their own deſpite.

This wiſe courtier hath learned, that ſecrecy is the ſureſt way of any important diſpatch. His errand could not but be known to the governors; their furtherance was enjoined for the proviſion of materials, elſe the walls of *Jeruſalem* had over-looked the firſt notice of their Heathen neighbours. Without any noiſe doth *Nehemiah* ariſe in the dead of night, and taking ſome few into his company, none into his council, he ſecretly rounds the decayed walls of *Jeruſalem*, and views the breaches, and obſerves the gates,

gates, and returns home in ſilence, joying in himſelf to foreſee thoſe reparations, which none of the inhabitants did once dream of. At laſt, when he had fully digeſted this great work in his own breaſt, he calls the rulers and citizens together; and having condoled with them the common diſtreſs and reproach, he tells them of the hand of his God, which was good upon him, he ſhews them the gracious commiſſion of the king his maſter for that good work. They anſwer him with a zealous encouragement of each other, *Let us riſe up and build.* Such an hearty invitation, countenanced by authority, hath eaſily ſtrengthened the hands of the multitude; with what obſervance and dearneſs do they now look upon their unexpected patron! how do they honour him as a man ſent from heaven, for the welfare of *Jeruſalem!* Every man flies to his hod and trowel, and rejoices to ſecond ſo noble a leader, in laying a ſtone in that wall of their common defence.

Thoſe emulous neighbours of theirs, *Sanballat*, *Tobiah*, *Geſhem*, the chief commanders of *Moab*, *Ammon*, *Arabia*, have ſoon eſpied the firſt mortar that is laid upon that old foundation. Envy is uſually more quick-ſighted than love: and now they ſcornfully apply themſelves to theſe deſpiſed *Jews*, and think to ſcoff them out of their work. The favourableſt perſecution of any good cauſe is the laſh of lewd tongues, whither by bitter taunts or by ſcurrilous invectives; which it is as impoſſible to avoid, as neceſſary to contemn. The barking of theſe dogs doth not hinder *Nehemiah* from walking on his way, profeſſing his confidence in the God of heaven, whoſe work that was; he ſhakes off their impotent malice, and goes on cheerfully to build: every *Iſraelite* knows his ſtation. *Eliaſhib* the high prieſt, and the reſt of that ſacred tribe, put the firſt hand to this work; they build the ſheep-gate, and ſanctify it, and in it all

all the reſt. As the firſt fruits of the field, ſo the firſt ſtones of the wall are hallowed to God, by the conſecration of thoſe devout agents. That buſineſs is like to proſper which begins with God.

No man was idle, no part was intermitted: all *Jeruſalem* was at once encompaſſed with buſy labourers. It cannot be, but the joint endeavours of faithful hearts muſt raiſe the walls of the church.

Now *Sanballat*, and his brethren, find ſome matter to ſpend their ſcoffs upon; *What do theſe feeble* Jews? *will they fortify themſelves? will they ſacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the ſtones out of the heaps of rubbiſh which are burnt?*

How baſely do carnal minds think of the projects, and actions of God's children! therefore vilifying them, becauſe they meaſure them by no other line than outward probability. O fooliſh *Moabites!* this work is God's, and therefore, in deſpite of all your tongues and hands, it ſhall proſper. He hears you whom ye have blaſphemed, and ſhall turn your reproach upon your own heads.

And thou, proud *Ammonite*, that couldſt ſay, *If a fox go upon their ſtone-wall, he ſhall break it down*, ſhalt well find, that all the wolviſh troops of your confederates ſhall not be able to remove one ſtone of this ſure fortification; while *Moab* and *Ammon* repine and bluſter in vain, this wall ſhall riſe, and, when *Moab* and *Ammon* ſhall ly in the duſt, this wall ſhall ſtand. The mortar, that hath been tempered with ſo many prayers, cannot but out-laſt all the flints and marbles of human confidence.

Now the growth of this wall hath turned the mirth of the adverſaries into rage: theſe *Moabites*, *Ammonites*, *Arabians*, *Aſhdodites*, conſpire all together to fight againſt *Jeruſalem*, and, while the mortar is yet green, to demoliſh thoſe envied heaps.

What

What hath this city offended, in desiring to be defenced? what wrong could it be to wish a freedom from wrongs? were this people so mighty, that there could be danger in overpowering their neighbours, or in resisting a common sovereign, there might have appeared some colour for this hostile opposition: but, alas! what could a despised handful do to the prejudice of either? It is quarrel enough to *Jerusalem*, that it would not be miserable.

Neither is it otherways with the head of these hellish complices; there needs no other cause of his utmost fury, than to see a poor soul struggling to get out of the reach of his tyranny. So do savage beasts bristle up themselves, and make the most fierce assaults, when they are in danger of losing the prey, which they had once seized on.

In the mean while, what doth *Nehemiah* with his *Jews* for their common safety? they pray and watch; they pray unto God, they watch against the enemy.

Thus, thus shall we happily prevail against those spiritual wickednesses which war against our souls. No evil can surprise us, if we watch; no evil can hurt us, if we pray. *This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.*

There was need of a continued vigilancy; the enemy was not more malicious, than subtile, and had said, *They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst amongst them, and slay them.* Open force is not so dangerous as close dissimulation; they meant to seem *Jews*, while they were *Moabites* and *Ammonites*, and in the clothes of brethren purposed to hide murderers. Never is Satan so prevalent, as when he comes transformed into an angel of light.

It was a merciful providence of God, that made these mens tongues the blabs of their own counsel. Many a fearful design had prospered, if wickedness could

could have been ſilent. Warning is a lawful guard to a wiſe adverſary: now doth *Nehemiah* arm his people, and, for the time, changes their trowels into ſwords, and ſpears, and bows, raiſing up their courage with a vehement exhortation, to remember the Lord, which is *great and terrible, and to fight for their brethren, their ſons, their daughters, their wives, and their houſes*. Nothing can ſo hearten us to the encountering of any evil, as the remembrance of that infinite Power and Wiſdom, which can either avert, or mitigate, or ſanctify it. We could not faint, if we did not forget God.

Neceſſity urges a man to fight for himſelf; love enables his hand to fight for thoſe which challenge a part in him. Where love meets with neceſſity, there can want no endeavour of victory. Neceſſity can make even cowards valiant; love makes the valiant unreſiſtible. *Nehemiah* doth not therefore perſuade theſe *Jews* to fight for themſelves, but for theirs. The judgment of the intereſt, and danger, cannot but quicken the dulleſt ſpirits.

Diſcovered counſels are already prevented. Theſe ſerpents die by being firſt ſeen; *When the enemies heard that it was known unto us*, they let fall their plot. Could we deſcry the enterpriſes of Satan, that tempter would return aſhamed.

It is a ſafe point of wiſdom to carry a jealous eye over thoſe whom we have once found hollow, and hoſtile. From that time forth *Nehemiah* divided the taſk betwixt the trowel and the ſword, ſo diſpoſing of every *Iſraelite*, that while one hand was a maſon, the other was a ſoldier: one is for work, the other for defence. O lively image of the church militant! wherein every one labours weaponed; wherein there is neither an idle ſoldier, nor a ſecure workman: every one ſo builds, as that he is ready to ward temptations; every one ſo wields the ſword of the ſpirit for defence,

defence, that withal he builds up himſelf in his moſt holy faith: here is neither a fruitleſs valour, nor an unſafe diligence.

But, what can our weapons avail us, if there be not means to warn us of an enemy? without a trumpet, we are armed in vain. *The work is great and large, and we are ſeparated upon the wall, one far from another.* Yea, ſo far as the utmoſt bounds of the earth, are we ſeparated one from another, upon the walls of the ſpiritual *Jeruſalem;* only the ſacred trumpets of God call us, who are diſtant in place, to a combination in profeſſion: and who are thoſe trumpets, but the public meſſengers of God, of whom God hath ſaid; *If the watchmen ſee the ſword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned, if the ſword come, and take any perſon from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.* Wo be to us, if we ſound not, if the ſound we give be uncertain; wo be to our people, if, when we premoniſh them of enemies, of judgments, they ſit ſtill unmoved, not buckling themſelves to a reſiſtance, to a prevention.

It is a mutual aid, to which theſe trumpets invite us; we might fight apart, without the ſignals of war; *In what place ye hear the ſound of the trumpet, reſort ye thither unto us.* There can be no ſafety to the church, but where every man thinks his life and welfare conſiſts in his fellows. Conjoined forces may proſper; ſingle oppoſitions are deſperate. All hearts and hands muſt meet in the common quarrel.

CONTEM. III. NEHEMIAH *redreſſing the extortion of the Jews.*

WITH what difficulty do theſe miſerable *Jews* ſettle in their *Jeruſalem!* the fear of foreign enemies doth not more afflict them than the extortion of their own: dearth is added unto war. Miſeries do not ſtay for a mannerly ſucceſſion to each other, but, in a rude importunity, throng in at once. *Babel* may be built with eaſe; but whoſoever goes about to raiſe the walls of God's city, ſhall have his hands full. The incurſion of public enemies may be prevented with vigilancy and power; but there is no defence againſt the ſecret grips of oppreſſion.

There is no remedy; the *Jews* are ſo taken up with their trowel and ſword, for the time, that they cannot attend their trades; ſo as, while the wall did riſe, their eſtates muſt needs impair. Even in the cheapeſt ſeaſon, they muſt needs be poor, that earned nothing but the public ſafety; how much more in common ſcarcity? Their houſes, lands, vineyards, are therefore mortgaged, yea, their very ſkins are ſold, for corn to their brethren: neceſſity forces them to ſell that, which it was cruelty to buy. What will we not, what muſt we not part with, for life? The covetous rulers did not conſider the occaſions of this want, but the advantage. Sometimes a bargain may be as unmerciful as a robbery. Charity muſt be the rule of all contracts, the violation whereof, whether in the matter or the price, cannot but be ſinful.

There could not be a juſter ground of expoſtulation, than this of the oppreſſed *Jews*; *Our fleſh is as the fleſh of our brethren, our children as their children; and lo, we bring into bondage our ſons and our daughters.* While there is no difference in nature, why ſhould there be ſuch an injurious diſproportion in condition? even the ſame fleſh may bear

bear a juſt inequality; ſome may be rulers, while others are ſubjects; ſome wealthy, others poor: but, why thoſe wealthy rulers ſhould tyrannize over thoſe poor inferiors, and turn brotherhood into bondage, no reaſon can be given, but lawleſs ambition. If there were one fleſh of peers, another of peaſants, there ſhould be ſome colour for the proud impoſitions of the great, as, becauſe the fleſh of beaſts is in a lower rank than ours, we kill, we devour it at pleaſure: but now, ſince the large body of mankind conſiſts of the ſame fleſh, why ſhould the hand ſtrike the foot? and if one fleſh may challenge meet reſpects from us, how much more one ſpirit? The ſpirit is more noble, than the fleſh is baſe; the fleſh is dead, without the ſpirit; the ſpirit, without the fleſh, active and immortal. Our ſoul, though ſhapeleſs and immaterial, is more apparently one than the fleſh; and if the unity of our human ſpirit call us to a mutual care and tenderneſs, in our carriage each to other, how much more of the divine? by that we are men, by this we are Chriſtians. As the ſoul animates us to a natural life, ſo doth God's ſpirit animate the ſoul to an heavenly, which is ſo one, that it cannot be divided. How ſhould that one ſpirit cauſe us ſo far to forget all natural and civil differences, as not to contemn, not to oppreſs any whom it informeth? they are not Chriſtians, not men, that can enjoy the miſeries of their brethren, whether in the fleſh or ſpirit.

Good *Nehemiah* cannot chuſe but be much moved at the barbarous extortion of the people; and now, like an impartial governor, he rebukes the rulers and nobles, whoſe hand was thus bloody with oppreſſion. As of fiſhes, ſo of men, the leſſer are a prey to the great. It is an ill uſe made of power, when the weight of it ſerves only to cruſh the weak. There were no living amongſt men, had not God ordained higher than the higheſt; and yet higher than they.

Eminency of place cannot be better improved, than by taking down mighty offenders.

If nobility do embaſe itſelf to any foul ſin, it is ſo much more worthy of coertion, by how much the perſon is of greater mark.

The juſtice of this reproof could not but ſhame impudence itſelf: *We, after our ability, have redeemed our brethren the* Jews *which were ſold to the Heathen, and will you ſell your brethren, or ſhall they be ſold to us?* Shall they find at home that yoke of bondage which they had put off abroad? while they are ſtill *Jews*, ſhall we turn *Aſſyrians?* if they muſt be ſlaves, why not rather to enemies than to brethren? how much more tolerable were a foreign ſervitude, than a domeſtical. Be aſhamed, O ye nobles of *Iſrael*, to renew *Babylon* in *Jeruſalem*. I marvel not, if the offenders be ſtricken dumb with ſo unanſwerable an expoſtulation. Guiltineſs and confuſion have ſtopped their mouths.

Many of thoſe who have not had grace enough to refrain ſin, yet are not ſo utterly void of grace as to maintain ſin. Our after-wits are able to diſcern a kind of unreaſonableneſs in thoſe wicked actions, which the firſt appearance repreſents unto us plauſible. Gain leads in ſin, but ſhame follows it out. There are thoſe that are bold and witty to bear out commodious or pleaſant evils; neither could theſe *Jewiſh* enormities have wanted ſome colours of defence: their ſtock was their own, which might have been otherways improved to no leſs profit. The offer, the ſuit of theſe bargains, was from the ſellers: theſe eſcheats fell into their hands unſought; neither did their contract cauſe the need of their brethren, but relieve it: but their conſcience will not bear this plea. I know not whether the maintenance of the leaſt evil be not worſe than the commiſſion of the greateſt: this may

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be of frailty, that argues obſtinacy. There is hope of that man that can bluſh, and be ſilent.

After the conviction of the fact, it is ſeaſonable for *Nehemiah* to perſuade reformation. No oratory is ſo powerful, as that of mildneſs; eſpecially when we have to do with thoſe, who, either through ſtomach, or greatneſs, may not endure a rough reproof. The drops that fall eaſily upon the corn, ripen and fill the ear; but the ſtormy ſhowers, that fall with violence, beat down the ſtalks flat to the earth, and lay whole fields, without hope of recovery. Who can reſiſt this ſweet and ſovereign reprehenſion; *Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God, becauſe of the reproach of the Heathen, our enemies?* Did we dwell alone in the midſt of the earth, yet the fear of our God ſhould over-awe our ways; but now, that we dwell in the midſt of our enemies, whoſe eyes are bent upon all our actions, whoſe tongues are as ready to blaſpheme God, as we to offend him, how carefully ſhould we avoid thoſe ſins, which may draw ſhame upon our profeſſion!

Now the ſcandal is worſe than the fact; thus ſhall religion ſuffer more from the Heathen, than our brethren do from us. If juſtice, if charity cannot ſway with us, yet let the ſcornful inſultations of the profane *Gentiles* fright us from theſe preſſures. No ingenuous diſpoſition can be ſo tender of his own diſgrace, as the true *Iſraelite* is of the reproach of his God: what is it that he will not rather refrain, do, ſuffer, than that glorious name ſhall hazard a blemiſh? They cannot want outward retentives from ſin, that live either among friends or enemies; if friends, they may not be grieved; if enemies, they may not be provoked. Thoſe that would live well, muſt ſtand in awe of all eyes; even thoſe that are without the church, yet may not be without regard. No perſon

ſon can be ſo contemptible, as that his cenſure ſhould be contemned.

In diſſuading from ſin, reaſon itſelf cannot prevail more than example. *I likeways, and my brethren, and my ſervants, might exact of them money and corn; but from the time that I was appointed to the charge of* Judah, *I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor.* He ſhall never rule well, that doth all that he may: it is not ſafe for either part, that a prince ſhould live at the height of his power; and if the greateſt abate of their right, is it for inferiors to extort? Had *Nehemiah* aimed at his own greatneſs, no man could have had fairer pretences for his gain.

The former governors, that were before him, were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beſides forty ſhekels of ſilver. His foot had not firſt trod in this commodious path; it was beaten by the ſteps of his predeceſſors; neither did any of them walk beſides it. However it might be envious to raiſe new taxations, yet to continue thoſe he found unrepined at, had been out of the reach of exception. A good governor looks not ſo much what hath been done, as what ſhould be: precedents are not the rule whereby he rules, but juſtice, but piety. *So did not I, becauſe of the fear of the Lord.* Laws are not a ſtraiter curb to ſubjects, than conſcience is to good princes.

They dare not do what they cannot do charitably. What advantage can they think it, to be from under the controlment of men, when the God of heaven notes, and puniſhes their offences? Whoſo walketh by this rule, can neither err nor miſcarry. It is no truſting to the external remedies of ſin; either they are not always preſent, or, if preſent, not powerful enough: but if the fear of God have once taken up

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the heart, it goes ever with us, and is ſtrong enough to over-maſter the forcibleſt temptation.

Therefore muſt theſe *Jews* follow this example of *Nehemiah*, becauſe he followed not the example of his predeceſſors; becauſe he left their evil, they muſt imitate his good. In vain ſhall rulers adviſe againſt their own practice; when they lead the way, they may well challenge to be followed. Seldom hath it been ever ſeen, that great perſons have not been ſeconded in evil: why ſhould not their power ſerve to make partners of their virtues?

Thus well did it ſpeed with *Nehemiah*: his merciful carriage, and zealous ſuit, have drawn the rulers to a promiſe of reſtitution; *We will reſtore them, and will require nothing of them, ſo will we do as thou ſayſt.*

It is no ſmall advantage that theſe nobles muſt forego in their releaſes: there cannot be a better ſign of a ſound amendment, than that we can be content to be loſers by our repentance. Many formal penitents have yielded to part with ſo much of their ſin, as may abate nothing of their profit: as if theſe rulers ſhould have been willing to reſtore the perſons, but withal ſhould have ſtood ſtiffly to require their ſums: this whining and partial ſatisfaction had been thankleſs. True remorſe enlargeth the heart, and openeth the hand, to a bountiful redemption of our errors.

Good purpoſes do too often cool in time, and vaniſh into a careleſs forgetfulneſs: *Nehemiah* feared this iſſue of theſe holy reſolutions; and therefore he proſecutes them in their firſt heat, not leaving theſe promiſes, till he had ſecured them with an oath; the prieſts are called for, that in their mouths the adjuration may be more ſolemn and ſacred. It is the beſt point of wiſdom, to take the firſt opportunity of fixing good

good motions, which otherways are of themſelves light and flighty. To make all yet more ſure, their oaths are croſs-barred with his execration: *Alſo I ſhook my lap, and ſaid, So God ſhake out every man from his houſe, and from his labour, that performeth not this promiſe, even thus be he ſhaken out, and emptied; and all the congregation ſaid, Amen.* A promiſe, an oath, a curſe, are paſſed upon this act; now, no *Iſraelite* dares faulter in the execution. When we have a ſin in chaſe, it is good to follow it home, not ſlackening our purſuit, till we have fully prevailed; and when it is once fallen under our hands, we cannot kill it too much.

Now *Nehemiah* having thus happily delivered his people from a domeſtical captivity, commends his ſervice to the gracious remuneration of the Almighty; *Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people;* therefore doth he refuſe the bread of the governor, that he may receive the reward of the Governor of heaven. Had he taken a temporary recompenſe, both he and it had been forgotten; now he hath made an happy change for eternity. Not that he pleads his merit, but ſues for mercy; neither doth he pray to be remembered for his work, but according to his work.

Our good deeds, as they are well accepted of God, ſo they ſhall not go unrewarded; and what God will give, why may not we crave? Doubtleſs, as we may offer up our honeſt obedience unto God, ſo we may expect and beg his promiſed retributions; not out of a proud conceit of the worth of our earnings, who, at the beſt, are no other than unprofitable ſervants, but out of a faithful dependence upon his pact of bounty, who cannot be leſs than his word. O God, if we do ought that is good, it is thine act, and not ours; crown thine own work in us, and take thou the glory of thine own mercies.

While

While *Nehemiah* is buſy in reforming abuſes at home, the enemy is plotting againſt him abroad; *Sanballat*, and *Tobiah*, and *Geſhem* the *Arabian*, conſpire againſt his life, and, in him, againſt the peace of *Jeruſalem*. What open hoſtility could not do, they hope to effect by pretence of treaties: four ſeveral meſſages call *Nehemiah* to a friendly meeting. Diſtruſt is a ſure guard. The wiſe governor hath learned to ſuſpect the hollow favours of an enemy, and to return them with ſafe and juſt excuſes: *I cannot come down; why ſhould the work ceaſe, while I leave it, and come down to you?* I do not hear him ſay, You intend miſchief to me, I will not come forth to you, though this were the proper cauſe of his forbearance; but he turns them off with an anſwer, that had as much truth as reſervedneſs. Fraud is the fitlieſt anſwered with ſubtilty. Even innocency is allowed a lawful craft; that man is in an ill caſe, that conceals no truth from an adverſary.

What entreaties cannot do, ſhall be attempted by threats; *Sanballat*'s ſervant comes now the fifth time with an open letter, importing dangerous intimations, wherein is written, *It is reported among the Heathen, and* Gaſhmu *ſaith it, that the* Jews *think to rebel; for which cauſe thou buildeſt the wall that thou mayſt be their king. It is reported:* and what falſhood may not plead this warrant? what can be more lying than report? *Among the Heathen:* and who is more ethnic then *Sanballat?* what Pagan can be worſe than a mongrel idolater? *And* Gaſhmu *ſaith it*, Aſk my fellow alſo; this *Arabian* was one of thoſe three heads of all the hoſtile combination, againſt *Jeruſalem*, againſt *Nehemiah*. It would be wide with innocence, if enemies might be allowed to accuſe. *That the* Jews *think to rebel:* a ſtale ſuggeſtion, but once powerful; malice hath learned to miſcal all actions;

where the hands cannot be taxed, very thoughts are prejudged: *For which cauſe thou buildeſt the wall, that thou mayſt be their king.* He was never a true *Iſraelite*, that hath not paſſed ſpiteful ſlanders and miſconſtructions. *Artaxerxes* knew his ſervant too well, to believe any rumour that ſhould have been ſo ſhameleſs. The ambition of *Nehemiah* was well known to reach only to the cup, not to the ſceptre of his ſovereign; and yet, to make up a ſound tale, *Prophets are ſuborned to preach, There is a king in* Judah; as if that loyal governor had corrupted the pulpits alſo, and had taught them the language of treaſon.

But what of all this? what if ſome falſe tongue have whiſpered ſuch idle tales? it is not ſafe for thee, O *Nehemiah*, to contemn report: perhaps this news ſhall fly to the court, and work thee a deadly diſpleaſure, ere thou canſt know thyſelf traduced; come therefore, and let us take counſel together. Surely that man cannot be ſparing of any thing, that is prodigal of his reputation. If ought under heaven can fetch *Nehemiah* out of his hold, it is the care of his fame. But that wary governor ſees a net ſpread near unto this ſtall; and therefore keeps aloof, not without contempt of thoſe fly devices: *There are no ſuch things done as thou ſayſt, but thou feignſt them out of thine own heart.* Some imputations are beſt anſwered with a negletive denial. It falls out often, that plain dealing puts craft out of countenance.

Since neither force nor fraud can kill *Nehemiah*, they will now try to draw him into a ſin, and thereby into a reproach: O God, that any prophet's tongue ſhould be mercenary! *Shemaiah* the ſeer is hired by *Tobiah* and *Sanballat*, to affright the governor with the noiſe of his intended murder, and to adviſe him, for ſhelter, to fly to the forbidden refuge of the temple. The

The colour was fair. Violence is meant to thy perſon; no place but one can promiſe thee ſafety; the city hath as yet no gates: come, therefore, and ſhut thyſelf up in the temple, there only ſhalt thou be free from all aſſaults.

And what if *Nehemiah* had hearkened to this counſel? ſin and ſhame had followed: that holy place was for none but perſons ſacred, ſuch as were privileged by blood and function; others ſhould preſume and offend in entering: and now what would the people ſay? What ſhall become of us, while our governor hides his head for fear? where ſhall we find a temple to ſecure us? what do we depending upon a cowardly leader?

Well did *Nehemiah* forecaſt theſe circumſtances, both of act and event; and therefore, reſolving to diſtruſt a prophet that perſuaded him to the violation of a law, he rejects the motion with ſcorn; *Should ſuch a man as I fly? ſhould I go into the temple to ſave my life? I will not go.* It is fit for great perſons to ſtand upon the honour of their places; their very ſtations ſhould put thoſe ſpirits into them, that ſhould make them hate to ſtoop unto baſe conditions.

Had God ſent this meſſage, we know he hath power to diſpenſe with his own laws; but well might the contradiction of a law argue the meſſage not ſent of God: God, as he is one, ſo doth he perfectly agree with himſelf. If any private ſpirit croſs a written word, let him be accurſed.

CONTEM. IV. AHASUERUS *feaſting*,—VASHTI *caſt off*,—ESTHER *choſen*.

WHAT bounds can be ſet to human ambition? *Ahaſuerus*, that is *Xerxes* the ſon of *Darius*, is already the king of an hundred and ſeven and twen-

ty provinces, and now is ready to fight for more. He hath newly ſubdued *Egypt*, and is now addreſſing himſelf for the conqueſt of *Greece*. He cannot hope ever to ſee all the land that he poſſeſſeth, and yet he cannot be quiet while he hears of more. Leſs than two ells of earth ſhall ere long ſerve him, whom, for the time, a whole world ſhall ſcarce ſatisfy; in vain ſhall a man ſtrive to have that which he cannot enjoy, and to enjoy ought by mere relation: it is a windy happineſs that is ſought in the exaggeration of theſe titles which are taken upon others credit, without the ſenſe of the owner. Nothing can fill the heart of man, but he that made it.

This great monarch, partly in triumph of the great victories that he hath lately won in *Egypt*, and partly for the animation of his princes and ſoldiers to his future exploits, makes a feaſt like himſelf, royal and magnificent.

What is greatneſs, if it be not ſhewed? and wherein can greatneſs be better ſhown, than in the achievements of war, and the entertainments of peace?

All other feaſts were but hunger to this of *Ahaſuerus*, whether we regard the number of gueſts, or the largeneſs of preparation, or continuance of time. During the ſpace of a whole half year, all the tables were ſumptuouſly furniſhed for all comers, from *India* to *Ethiopia*; a world of meat; every meal was ſo ſet on, as if it ſhould have been the laſt: yet all this long feaſt hath an end, and all this glory is ſhut up in forgetfulneſs. What is *Ahaſuerus* the better, that his peers then ſaid, he was incomparably great? what are his peers the better, that they were feaſted? Happy is he that eats bread, and drinks new wine in the kingdom of God; this banquet is for eternity, without intromiſſion, without ſatiety!

What variety of habits, of languages, of manners, met at the boards of *Ahaſuerus*? what confluence of ſtrange

ſtrange gueſts was there now to *Shuſhan?* And, leſt the glory of this great king might ſeem, like ſome coarſe picture, only fair afar off, after the princes and nobles of the remote provinces; all the people of *Shuſhan* are entertained for ſeven days, with equal pomp and ſtate. The ſpacious court of the palace is turned into a royal hall, the walls are of rich hangings, the pillars of marble, the beds of ſilver and gold, the pavement of prophyry, curiouſly checkered; the wine and the veſſels ſtrove whether ſhould be the richer, no men drunk in worſe than gold; and, while the metal was the ſame, the form of each cup was diverſe. The attendance was anſwerable to the cheer, and the freedom matched both: here was no compulſion, either to the meaſure or quality of the draught; every man's rule was his own choice. Who can but bluſh to ſee forced healths in Chriſtian banquets, when the civility of very Pagans commands liberty?

I cannot but envy the modeſty of heathen dames; *Vaſhti* the queen, and her ladies, with all the ſeveral ranks of that ſex, feaſt apart, entertaining each other with a baſhful courteſy, without wantonneſs, without that wild ſcurrility which uſeth to haunt promiſcuous meetings. O ſhameful unchaſtity of thoſe looſe Chriſtians, who muſt feed their luſt, while they fill their bellies, and think the feaſt imperfect, where they may not ſatiate their eye no leſs than palate!

The laſt day of this pompous feaſt is now come. King *Ahaſuerus* is ſo much more cheerful, by how much his gueſts are nearer to their diſmiſſion. Every one is wont to cloſe up his courteſy with ſo much more paſſion, as the laſt acts uſe to make the deeper impreſſion. And now, that he might at once amaze, and endear the beholders, *Vaſhti* the queen, in all her royalty, is called for: her ſight ſhall ſhut up the feaſt, that the princes and people may ſay, How happy is king

king *Ahaſuerus*, not ſo much in this greatneſs, as in that beauty!

Seven officers of the chamber are ſent to carry the meſſage, to attend her entrance, and are returned with a denial: perhaps *Vaſhti* thought, What means this uncouth motion? more than ſix months hath this feaſt continued; and, all this while, we have enjoyed the wonted liberty of our ſex. Were the king ſtill himſelf, this command could not be ſent; it is the wine, and not he, that is guilty of this errand: is it for me to humour him in ſo vain a deſire? will it agree with our modeſt reſervedneſs, to offer ourſelves to be gazed at by millions of eyes? who knows what wanton attempts may follow upon this ungoverned exceſs? This very meſſage argues, that wit and reaſon have yielded their places to that beſotting liquor. Nothing but abſence can ſecure us from ſome unbeſeeming proffer; neither doubt I, but the king, when he returns to himſelf, will give me thanks for ſo wiſe a forbearance.

Thus, upon the conceit, as is likely, that her preſence would be either needleſs or unſafe, *Vaſhti* refuſeth to come; although, perhaps, her great ſpirit thought much to receive a command from the hand of officers.

The blood, that is once inflamed with wine, is apt to boil with rage; *Ahaſuerus* is very wroth with this indign repulſe. It was the oſtentation of his glory and might that he affected before theſe princes, peers, people; and now that ſeems eclipſed, in the ſhutting up of all his magnificence, with the diſgraceful affront of a woman. It vexes him to think that thoſe nobles, whom he meant to ſend away aſtoniſhed with the admiration of his power and majeſty, ſhould now ſay What boots it, *Ahaſuerus*, to rule afar off, when he cannot command at home? in vain doth he boaſt to govern kings, while he is checked by a woman.

What-

Whatever were the intentions of *Vaſhti*, ſurely her diſobedience was inexcuſable. It is not for a good wife to judge of her husband's will, but to execute it; neither wit nor ſtomach may carry her into a curious inquiſition into the reaſons of an enjoined charge, much leſs to a reſiſtance; but, in a hood-winked ſimplicity, ſhe muſt follow, whither ſhe is led, as one that holds her chief praiſe to conſiſt in ſubjection.

Where ſhould the perfection of wiſdom dwell, if not in the courts of great princes? or what can the treaſures of monarchs purchaſe more invaluably precious, than learned and judicious attendance? or who can be ſo fit for honour as the wiſeſt?

I doubt how *Ahaſuerus* could have been ſo great, if his throne had not been ſtill compaſſed with them that knew the times, and underſtood the law and judgment. Theſe were his oracles in all his doubts, theſe are now conſulted in this difficulty; neither muſt their advice be ſecretly whiſpered in the king's ear, but publicly delivered in the audience of all the princes. It is a perilous way that theſe ſages are called to go, betwixt an husband and wife, eſpecially of ſuch power and eminency: yet *Memucan* fears not to paſs a heavy ſentence againſt queen *Vaſhti; Vaſhti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but alſo to all the princes, and all the people, that are in all the provinces of the king* Ahaſuerus. A deep and ſore crimination; injuries are ſo much more intolerable, as they are dilated unto more; thoſe offences, which are of narrow extent, may receive an eaſy ſatisfaction; the amends are not poſſible, where the wrong is univerſal: *For this deed of the queen ſhall come abroad to all women, ſo that they ſhall deſpiſe their husbands in their eyes.* Indeed ſo public a fact muſt needs fly; that concourſe gave fit opportunity to diffuſe it all the world over. The examples of the great are eaſily drawn into rules.

Bad

Bad leſſons are apt to be taken out; as honour, ſo contempt, falls down from the head to the ſkirts, never aſcends from the ſkirts to the head.

Theſe wiſe men are ſo much the more ſenſible of this danger, as they ſaw it more likely the caſe might prove their own. *Likeways ſhall the ladies of* Perſia *and* Media *ſay this day unto all the kings and princes.* The firſt precedents of evil muſt be carefully avoided. If we care to keep a conſtant order in good, prudence cannot better beſtir itſelf, than in keeping miſchief from home.

The foundation of this doom of *Memucan* is not laid ſo deep for nothing. *If it pleaſe the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the* Perſians *and* Medians, *that it be not altered, that* Vaſhti *come no more before* Ahaſuerus; *and let the king give her royal eſtate to another that is better than ſhe.* How bold a word was this, and how hazardous! had *Ahaſuerus* more loved the beauty of *Vaſhti* than his honour, *Memucan* had ſpoken againſt his own life. Howſoever, a queen of ſo great ſpirit, could not want ſtrength of favour and faction in the *Perſian* court, which could not but take fire at ſo deſperate a motion. Faithful ſtateſmen, overlooking private reſpects, muſt bend their eyes upon public dangers, labouring to prevent a common miſchief, though with the adventure of their own. Nature had taught theſe Pagans the neceſſity of a female ſubjection, and the hate and ſcorn of a proud diſobedience. They have unlearned the very dictates of nature, that can abide the head to be ſet below the rib.

I cannot ſay but *Vaſhti* was worthy of a ſharp cenſure; I cannot ſay ſhe was worthy a repudiation. This plaiſter drew too hard: it was but Heathen juſtice to puniſh the wife's diſobedience, in one indifferent act, with a divorce. Nothing but the violation of

of the marriage-bed can either break, or untie the knot of marriage. Had ſhe not been a queen, had not that contemptuous act been public, the ſentence had not been ſo hard; now the puniſhment muſt be exemplary, leſt the ſin ſhould be ſo. Many a one had ſmarted leſs, if their perſons, if their place had been meaner.

The king, the princes approve this heavy judgment of *Memucan*: it is not in the power of the fair face of *Vaſhti* to warrant her ſtomach. No doubt many meſſages paſſed ere the rigour of this execution. That great heart knows not to relent, but will rather break, than yield to an humble deprecation. When the ſtone and the ſteel meet, fire is ſtricken: it is a ſoft anſwer that appeaſeth wrath. *Vaſhti* is caſt off. Letters are ſent from the king, into all his provinces, to command that every man ſhould rule at home: the court affords them an awful pattern of authority. Had not *Ahaſuerus* doted much upon *Vaſhti*'s beauty, he had not called her forth, at the feaſt, to be wondered at by his peers and people; yet now he ſo feels the wound of his reputation, that he forgets he ever felt any wound of his affection. Even the greateſt love may be overſtrained: it is not ſafe preſuming upon the deepeſt aſſurances of dearneſs. There is no heart that may not be eſtranged. It is not poſſible that great princes ſhould want ſoothing up in all their inclinations, in all their actions. While *Ahaſuerus* is following the chace of his ambition, in the wars of *Greece*, his followers are providing for his luſt at home. Nothing could ſound more pleaſing to a carnal ear, than that all the fair young virgins, throughout all his dominions, ſhould be gathered into his palace at *Shuſhan*, for his aſſay and choice. The decree is ſoon publiſhed: the charge is committed to *Hege*, the king's chamberlain, both of their purification and ornaments.

What ſtrife, what emulation was now amongſt all the *Perſian* damſels, that either were, or thought themſelves fair? Every one hopes to be a queen, and ſees no reaſon why any other ſhould be thought more excellent. How happy were we, if we could be ſo ambitious of our eſpouſals to the King of heaven?

Amongſt all this throng of virgins, God hath provided a wife for *Ahaſuerus*, having determined his choice, where moſt advantage ſhall riſe to his forlorn people.

The *Jews* were miſerably ſcattered over the world, in that woful deportation under *Jeconiah*; ſcarce an handful of them returned to *Jeruſalem*, the reſt remain ſtill diſperſed, where they may but have leave to live. There are many thouſands of them turned over, with the *Babylonian* monarchy, to the *Perſian*: amongſt the reſt was *Mordecai* the ſon of *Jair*, of the tribe of *Benjamin*, a man of no mean note or ability, who, living in *Shuſhan*, had brought up *Hadaſſah*, or *Eſther*, his uncle's daughter, in a liberal faſhion: it was happy for this orphan, that, in a region of captivity, ſhe light into ſuch good hands. Her wiſe kinſman finds it fit, that her breeding and habit ſhould be *Perſian*-like: in outward and civil forms, there was no need to vary from the Heathen; her religion muſt be her own; the reſt was ſo altogether theirs, that her very nation was not diſcerned.

The ſame God, that had given incomparable beauty to this *Jeweſs*, gave her alſo favour in the eyes of *Hege*, the keeper of the women: ſhe is not only taken into the *Perſian* court, as one of the ſelected virgins, but obſerved with more than ordinary reſpect; all neceſſaries for her ſpeedy purification are brought to her; ſeven maids are allowed for her attendance, and the beſt and moſt honourable place in that ſeraglio is allotted to her: as if this great officer had deſigned her for a queen, before the choice of his maſter.

What

What ſtrange preparation was here for the impure bed of an Heathen? every virgin muſt be ſix months purified with the oil of myrrh, and ſix other months perfumed with ſweet odours, beſides thoſe ſpecial receipts that were allowed to each, upon their own election. O God, what care, what coſt is requiſite to that ſoul which ſhould be addreſſed a fit bride for thine own holy and glorious Majeſty!

When we have ſcoured ourſelves with the moſt cleanſing oil of our repentance, and have perfumed ourſelves with thy beſt graces, and our perfecteſt obedience, it is the only praiſe of thy mercy, that we may be accepted.

The other virgins paſſed their probation unregarded. When *Eſther*'s turn came, though ſhe required nothing, but took what was given her; though ſhe affected nothing, but brought that face, that demeanour which nature had caſt upon her, no eye ſees her without admiration: the king takes ſuch pleaſure in her beauty, that, contemning all the other vulgar forms, his choice is fully fixed upon her. All things muſt proſper, where God hath intended the ſucceſs. The moſt wiſe providence of the Almighty fetches his projects from far: the preſervation and advantage of his own people is in hand; for the contriving of this, *Vaſhti* ſhall be abandoned, the virgins ſhall be choſen; *Eſther* only ſhall pleaſe *Ahaſuerus*, *Mordecai* ſhall diſpleaſe *Haman*; *Haman*'s ruin ſhall raiſe *Mordecai*. The purpoſes of God cannot be judged by his remote actions; only the accompliſhment ſhews his deſigns; in the mean-time, it pleaſeth him to look another way than he moves, and to work his own ends by arbitrary and unlikely accidents.

None but *Eſther* ſhall ſucceed *Vaſhti*, ſhe only carries the heart of *Ahaſuerus* from all her ſex; the royal crown is ſet upon her head; and as *Vaſhti* was caſt off at a feaſt, ſo with a ſolemn feaſt ſhall *Eſther*

be eſpouſed: here wanted no triumph to expreſs the joy of this great bridegroom, and, that the world might witneſs he could be no leſs loving than ſevere, all his provinces ſhall feel the pleaſure of this happy match, in their immunities, in their rich gifts.

With what envious eyes do we think *Vaſhti* looked upon her glorious rival! how doth ſhe now, though too late, ſecretly chide her peeviſh will, that had thus ſtript her of her royal crown, and made way for a more happy ſucceſſor! Little did ſhe think her refuſal could have had ſo heinous a conſtruction; little did ſhe fear, that one word, perhaps not ill meant, ſhould have forfeited her huſband, her crown, and all that ſhe was. Whoſo is not wiſe enough to forecaſt the danger of an offence, or indiſcretion, may have leiſure enough of an unſeaſonable repentance.

That mind is truly great and noble that is not changed with the higheſt proſperity; queen *Eſther* cannot forget her couſin *Mordecai;* no pomp can make her ſlight the charge of ſo dear a kinſman: in all her royalty ſhe caſts her eye upon him amongſt the throng of beholders, but ſhe muſt not know him; her obedience keeps her in awe, and will not ſuffer her to draw him up with her, to the participation of her honour: it troubles her not a little to forbear this duty, but ſhe muſt; it is enough for her, that *Mordecai* hath commanded her not to be known, who, or whoſe ſhe was.

Perhaps the wiſe *Jew* feared, that, while her honour was yet green and unſettled, the notice of her nation, and the name of a deſpiſed captive, might be ſome blemiſh to her in that proud court, when as afterwards, upon the merit of her carriage, and the full poſſeſſion of all hearts, her name might dignify her nation, and countermand all reproaches.

Mordecai was an officer in the court of *Ahaſuerus*, his ſervice called him daily to attend in the king's gate; much

much better might he, being a *Jew*, ſerve a Pagan maſter, than his foſter-daughter might aſcend to a Pagan's bed.

If the neceſſity or convenience of his occaſions called him to ſerve, his piety and religion called him to faithfulneſs in his ſervice: two of the king's chamberlains, *Bigthan* and *Tereſh*, conſpire againſt the life of their ſovereign. No greatneſs can ſecure from treachery or violence: he that ruled over millions of men, through an hundred and ſeven and twenty provinces, cannot aſſure himſelf from the hand of a villain; he, that had the power of other mens lives, is in danger of his own. Happy is that man that is once poſſeſſed of a crown incorruptible, unfadable, reſerved for him in heaven: no force, no treaſon can reach thither; there can be no peril of either violence, or forfeiture there.

The likelieſt defence of the perſon of any prince, is the fidelity of his attendants: *Mordecai* over-hears the whiſpering of theſe wicked conſpirators, and reveals it to *Eſther;* ſhe (as glad of ſuch an opportunity to commend unto *Ahaſuerus* the loyalty of him whom ſhe durſt but ſecretly honour) reveals it to the king: the circumſtances are examined, the plot is diſcovered, the traitors executed, the ſervice recorded in the *Perſian* annals. A good foundation is thus laid for *Mordecai*'s advancement, which yet is not over-haſtened on either part; worthy diſpoſitions labour only to deſerve well, leaving the care of their remuneration to them whom it concerns: it is fit that God's leiſure ſhould be attended in all his deſignments. The hour is ſet, when *Mordecai* ſhall be raiſed: if in the meantime there be an intervention, not only of neglect, but of fears and dangers, all theſe ſhall make his honours ſo much more ſweet, more precious.

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CONTEM. V. HAMAN *diſreſpected by* MORDECAI;—MORDECAI'*s meſſage to* ESTHER.

BEſides the charge of his office, the care of *Eſther*'s proſperity calls *Mordecai* to the king's gate, and fixes him there: with what inward contentment did he think of his ſo royal pupil! Here I ſit among my fellows; little doth the world think that mine adopted child ſits in the throne of *Perſia*, that the great empreſs of the world owes herſelf to me: I might have more honour, I could not have ſo much ſecret comfort, if all *Shuſhan* knew what intereſt I have in queen *Eſther*.

While his heart is taken up with theſe thoughts, who ſhould come ruffling by him, but the new-raiſed favourite of king *Ahaſuerus*, *Haman* the ſon of *Hammedatha* the *Agagite!* him hath the great king unexpectedly advanced, and ſet his ſeat above all the princes that were with him. The gracious reſpects of princes are not always led by merit, but by their own will, which is ever affected to be ſo much the freer, as themſelves would be held more great.

When the ſun ſhines upon the dial, every paſſenger will be looking at it; there needed no command of reverence, where *Ahaſuerus* was pleaſed to countenance; all knees will bow alone, even to forbidden idols of honour, how much more where royal authority enjoins obeiſance! All the ſervants, all the ſubjects of king *Ahaſuerus*, are willingly proſtrate before this great minion of their ſovereign; only *Mordecai* ſtands ſtiff, as if he ſaw nothing more than a man in that proud *Agagite*.

They are not obſerved that do as the moſt, but if any one man ſhall vary from the multitude, all eyes are turned upon him: *Mordecai*'s fellow-officers note this palpable irreverence, and expoſtulate it; *Why tranſgreſſeſt thou the king's commandments?* Conſider-

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eſt thou not how far this affront reacheth? it is not the perſon of *Haman* whom thou refuſeſt to adore, but the king in him: neither do we regard ſo much the man, as the command; let him be never ſo vile whom the king bids to be honoured, with what ſafety can a ſubject examine the charge, or reſiſt it? his unworthineſs cannot diſpenſe with our loyalty.

What a dangerous wilfulneſs ſhould it be to incur the forfeiture of thy place, of thy life, for a courteſy? If thou wilt not bow with others, expect to ſuffer alone; perhaps they thought this omiſſion was unheedy, in a caſe of ignorance or incogitancy; it was a friendly office to admoniſh; the ſight of the error had been the remedy.

Mordecai hears their challenge, their advice, and thinks good to anſwer both with ſilence, as willing they ſhould imagine his inflexibleneſs proceeded from a reſolution, and that reſolution upon ſome ſecret grounds, which he needed not impart; at laſt, yet he imparts thus much, Let it ſuffice that I am a *Jew*, and *Haman* an *Amalekite*.

After a private expoſtulation, the continuance of that open neglect is conſtrued for a ſullen obſtinacy; and now the monitors themſelves grow ſenſible of the contempt: men are commonly impatient to loſe the thank of their endeavours, and are prone to hate whom they cannot reform. Partly therefore to pick a thank, and partly to revenge this contumacy, theſe officers turn informers againſt *Mordecai*, neither meant to make the matter fairer than it was; they tell *Haman*, how proud and ſtubborn a *Jew* ſat amongſt them; how ill they could brook ſo ſaucy an affront to be offered to his greatneſs; how ſeriouſly they had expoſtulated, how ſtomachfully the offender perſiſted, and beſeech him that he would be pleaſed, in his next paſſage, to caſt ſome glances that way, and but obſerve the faſhion of that intolerable inſolency.

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The proud *Agagite* cannot long endure the very expectation of ſuch an indignity: on purpoſe doth he ſtalk thither, with higher than his ordinary ſteps, ſnuffing up the air as he goes, and would ſee the man that durſt deny reverence to the greateſt prince of *Perſia*.

Mordecai holds his old poſture, only he is ſo much more careleſs, as he ſees *Haman* more diſdainful and imperious; neither of them goes about to hide his paſſion; one looked, as if he had ſaid, I hate the pride of *Haman;* the other looked, as if he had ſaid, I will plague the contempt of *Mordecai*. How did the eyes of *Haman* ſparkle with fury, and as it were, dart out deadly beams in the face of that deſpiteful *Jew!* how did he ſwell with indignation, and then again wax pale with anger! ſhortly, his very brow and his motion bade *Mordecai* look for the utmoſt of revenge.

Mordecai foreſees his danger, and contemns it; no frowns, no threats can ſupple thoſe joints: he may break, he will not bow.

What ſhall we ſay then to this obſirmed reſolution of *Mordecai?* what is it, what can it be, that ſo ſtiffens the knees of *Mordecai*, that death is more eaſy to him than their incurvation? Certainly, if mere civility were in queſtion, this wilful irreverence to ſo great a peer could not paſs without the juſt cenſure of a rude perverſeneſs. It is religion that forbids this obeiſance, and tells him, that ſuch courteſy could not be free from ſin; whether it were, that more than human honour was required to this new-erected image of the great king, as the *Perſians* were ever wont to be noted for too much laviſhneſs in theſe courtly devotions, or whether it were, that the ancient curſe, wherewith God had branded the blood and ſtock of *Haman*, made it unlawful for an *Iſraelite* to give him any obſervance: for the *Amalekites*, of whoſe royal line *Haman* was deſcended, were the nation, with which God had ſworn perpetual hoſtility, and whoſe memory he had ſtrait-

ſtraitly charged his people to root out from under heaven; how may I, thinks he, adore where God commands me to deteſt? how may I profeſs reſpect, where God profeſſeth enmity? how may I contribute to the eſtabliſhment of that ſeed upon earth, which God hath charged to be pulled up from under heaven? Outward actions of indifferency, when once they are felt to trench upon the conſcience, lay deep obligations upon the ſoul, even while they are moſt ſlighted by careleſs hearts.

In what a flame of wrath doth *Haman* live this while? wherewith he could not but have conſumed his own heart, had he not given vent to that rage in his aſſured purpoſes of revenge. Great mens anger is like to themſelves, ſtrong, fierce, ambitious, of an exceſſive ſatisfaction. *Haman* ſcorns to take up with the blood of *Mordecai*, this were but a vulgar amends; poor men can kill where they hate, and expiate their own wrong with the life of a ſingle enemy. *Haman*'s fury ſhall fly an higher pitch, millions of throats are few enough to bleed for this offence: it is a *Jew* that hath deſpited him; the whole nation of the *Jews* ſhall periſh for the ſtomach of this one. The monarchy of the world was now in the hand of the *Perſian*; as *Judea* was within this compaſs, ſo there was ſcarce a *Jew* upon earth without the verge of the *Perſian* dominions: the generation, the name ſhall now die at once; neither ſhall there be any memory of them but this, There was a people, which having been famous through the world for three thouſand four hundred and fourſcore years, were, in a moment, extinct by the power of *Haman*, for default of a courteſy.

Perhaps that hereditary grudge and old antipathy, that was betwixt *Iſrael* and *Amalek*, ſtuck ſtill in the heart of this *Agagite*; he might know that God had commanded *Iſrael* to root out *Amalek* from under heaven; and now therefore an *Amalekite* ſhall be

ready to take this advantage againſt *Iſrael*. It is extreme injuſtice to dilate the puniſhment beyond the offence, and to enwrap thouſands of innocents within the treſpaſs of one. How many that were yet unborn, when *Haman* was unſaluted, muſt rue the fact they lived not to know! How many millions of *Jews* were then living, that knew not there was a *Mordecai!* all of them are fetched into one condition, and muſt ſuffer, ere they can know their offence. O the infinite diſtance betwixt the unjuſt cruelty of men, and the juſt mercies of the Almighty! Even *Caiaphas* himſelf could ſay, *It is better that one man die, than that all the people ſhould periſh;* and here *Haman* can ſay, *It is better that all the people ſhould periſh, than that one man ſhould die.* Thy mercy, O God, by the willing death of one that had not ſinned, hath defrayed the juſt death of a world of ſinners! while the injurious rigour of a man, for the ſuppoſed fault of one, would deſtroy a whole nation that had not offended. It is true, that, by the ſin of one, death reigned over all; but it was, becauſe all ſinned in that one; had not all men been in *Adam*, all had not fallen in him, all had not died in him; it was not the man, but mankind that fell into ſin, and by ſin into death. No man can complain of puniſhment, while no man can exempt himſelf from the tranſgreſſion. Unmerciful *Haman* would have imbrued his hands in that blood, which he could not but confeſs innocent.

It is a rare thing, if the height of favour cauſe not preſumption; ſuch is *Haman*'s greatneſs, that he takes his deſign for granted, ere it can receive a motion: the fitteſt days for this great maſſacre are determined by the lots of their common divination; according whereunto, *Haman* chuſeth the hour of this bloody ſuit; and now, waited on by opportunity, he adreſſeth himſelf to king *Ahaſuerus*: *There is a certain people*

people ſcattered abroad, and diſperſed among the people, in all the provinces of the kingdom, and their laws are diverſe from all people; neither keep they the king's laws, therefore it is not for the king's profit to ſuffer them; if it pleaſe the king, let it be written that they may be deſtroyed, and I will pay ten thouſand talents of ſilver into the hands of the officers. With what cunning hath this man couched his malice? he doth not ſay, There is a *Jew* that hath affronted me, let me be avenged of his nation; this rancour was too monſtrous to be confeſſed; perhaps this ſuggeſtion might have bred in the mind of *Ahaſuerus* a conceit of *Haman*'s ill nature, and intolerable immanity: but his pretences are plauſible, and ſuch as drive at no other than the public good: every word hath its inſinuation, *It is a ſcattered people:* were the nation entire, their maintenance could not but ſtand with the king's honour; but now ſince they are but ſtragglers, as their loſs would be inſenſible, ſo their continuance and mixture cannot but be prejudicial: it was not the fault, it was the miſery of theſe poor *Jews* that they were diſperſed, and now their diſperſion is made an argument of their extirpation; therefore muſt they be deſtroyed from the earth, becauſe they were ſcattered over the earth. As good, ſo evils draw on each other; that which ſhould plead for pity in the well-affected, is a motive to cruelty in ſavage minds. Seldom ever hath extremity of miſchief ſeized, where eaſier afflictions have not been billeted before.

All faithful *Jews* had wont to ſay unto God, *Have mercy upon us, O God, and ſave us, for our ſoul is full of contempt, and we are ſcattered amongſt the Heathen;* and here this enemy can ſay of them to *Ahaſuerus, Deſtroy them, for they are ſcattered;* root them out, for they are contemned. How much better is it to fall into the hands of God,

than of men, ſince that which whets the ſword of men, works commiſeration in the Almighty? beſides the diſſipation of the perſons, *Their laws are diverſe from all people.* All other people live by thy laws, they only by their own: and how can this ſingularity of their faſhions but breed diſorder and inconvenience? Did they live in ſome corner of the earth apart, the difference in religion and government could not import much; now, that they are diſperſed amongſt all thy ſubjects, what do theſe uncouth forms of theirs but teach all the world to be irregular? why ſhould they live under thy protection, that will not be governed by thy laws?

Wicked *Haman!* what were the laws of *Iſrael*, but the laws of God? if this be a quarrel, what ſhall the death of the *Jews* be other than martyrdom?

The diverſity of judgment and practice from the reſt of the world, hath been an old and envious imputation caſt upon God's church. What if we be ſingled from others, while we walk with God? In matters lawful, arbitrary, indifferent, wiſdom teacheth us to conform ourſelves to all others; but where God hath laid a ſpecial impoſition upon us, we muſt either vary or ſin. The greateſt glory of *Iſrael* was their laws, wherein they as far exceeded all other nations, as heaven is above earth; yet here their laws are quarrelled, and are made the inducements of their deſtruction. It is not poſſible that the church of God ſhould eſcape perſecution, while that which it hath good is maligned, while that offends which makes it happy.

Yet that they have laws of their own were not ſo unſufferable, if withal they did obſerve thine, O king; but theſe *Jews*, as they are unconformable, ſo they are ſeditious: *They keep not the king's laws.* Thou ſlandereſt, *Haman;* they could not keep their own laws, if they kept not the king's; for their laws call them to obedience unto their ſovereigns, and adjudge

judge hell to the rebellious. In all thoſe hundred and ſeven and twenty provinces, king *Ahaſuerus* hath no ſubjects but them; they obey out of conſcience, others out of fear: why are they charged with that, which they do moſt abhor? what can be the ground of this crimination? *Ahaſuerus* commanded all knees to bow to *Haman*; a *Jew* only refuſes. Malicious *Haman!* he that refuſed to bow unto thee, had ſufficiently approved his loyalty to *Ahaſuerus*; *Ahaſuerus* had not been, if *Mordecai* had not been a good ſubject. Hath the king no laws, but what concern thine adoration? Set aſide religion, (wherein the *Jew* is ready to preſent, if not active, yet paſſive obedience) and name that *Perſian* law which a *Jew* dares break.

As I never yet read or heard of a conſcionable *Iſraelite*, that hath not paſſed under this calumniation, ſo I cannot yield him a true *Iſraelite* that deſerves it.

In vain doth he profeſs to acknowledge a God in heaven, that denies homage to his deputy on earth.

It is not for the king's profit to ſuffer them. Wordly hearts are not led by good or evil, but by profit or loſs; neither have they grace to know, that nothing is profitable but what is honeſt, nothing ſo deſperately incommodious as wickedneſs; they muſt needs offend by rule, that meaſure all things by profit, and meaſure profit by their imagination. How eaſy is it to ſuggeſt ſtrange untruths, when there is no body to give an anſwer? Falſe *Haman*, how is it not for the king's profit to ſuffer the *Jews?* if thou conſtrue this profit for honour, the king's honour is in the multitude of ſubjects; and what people more numerous than they? if for gain, the king's profit is in the largeneſs of his tributes; and what people are more deep in their payments? if for ſervice, what people are more officious? How can it ſtand with the king's profit to bereave himſelf of ſubjects, his ſubjects of their lives, his exchequer of their tributes,

butes, his ſtate of their defence? He is a weak politician that knows not to gild over the worſt project, with a pretence of public utility. No name under heaven hath made ſo many fools, ſo many villains, as this of profit.

Laſtly, as *Ahaſuerus* reaps nothing but diſprofit by the lives of the *Jews*, ſo he ſhall reap no ſmall profit by their deaths: *I will pay ten thouſand talents of ſilver to the king's treaſury for this execution.* If revenge were not very ſweet to the malicious man, he could not be content to purchaſe it at ſo high a rate. How do we ſee daily, that the thirſt hereof carries men to a riotous prodigality of eſtate, body, ſoul!

Cruel *Haman*, if thou couldſt have ſwimmed in a whole ſea of *Jewiſh* blood, if thou couldſt have raiſed mountains of their carcaſes, if thou couldſt have made all *Perſia* thy ſhambles, who would have given thee one farthing for all thoſe piles of fleſh, for all thoſe ſtreams of blood? yea, who would not rather have been at charge for the avoiding of the annoyances of thoſe ſlaughtered bodies, which thou offereſt to buy at ten thouſand talents? It were an happy thing, if charity could enlarge itſelf but ſo much as malice; if the preſervation of mankind could be ſo much beholden to our bounty, as the deſtruction.

Now when all theſe are laid together, the baſeneſs and diſperſedneſs of the people, the diverſity of the laws, the irregularity of their government, the rebellion of their practice, the inconvenience of their toleration, the gain of their extirpation; what could the wit or art of man deviſe more inſinuative, more likely to perſuade? How could it be, but *Ahaſuerus* muſt needs think, (ſince he could not ſuſpect the ground of this ſuit) what a zealous patriot have I raiſed, that can be content to buy off the incommodity of the ſtate at his own charge! how worthy is he rather of the aid both of my power and purſe! why

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ſhould I be fee'd to eaſe my kingdoms of rebels! *The ſilver is given to thee, the people alſo, to do with them as ſeemeth good to thee.* Without all delay, the ſecretaries are called to write the warrants, the king's ring is given to ſeal them, the poſts are ſent out to carry them into all provinces. The day is ſet wherein all *Jews*, of all ages, of both ſexes, through the hundred and ſeven and twenty provinces of the king, ſhall be ſacrificed to the wrath of *Haman*.

In all the carriage of *Ahaſuerus*, who ſees not too much headineſs of paſſion? *Vaſhti* is caſt off for a trifle, the *Jews* are given to the ſlaughter for nothing; his rage in the one, his favour in the other, is too impotent. He is not a worſe husband than a king: the bare word of *Haman* is enough to kill ſo many ſubjects. No diſpoſition can be more dangerous in great perſons, than violence of affection mixed with credulity. O the ſeeming inequality of human conditions! *The king and* Haman *ſat down to drink, but the city of* Shuſhan *was perplexed.* It is a woful thing to ſee great ones quaff the tears of the oppreſſed, and to hear them make muſic of ſhrieks.

With what lamentation do we think all the ſynagogues of *Jews*, through the world, received this fatal meſſage of their proclaimed deſtruction! how do they bemoan themſelves each to other! how do their conjoined cries fill heaven and earth! But above all, what ſackloth and aſhes could ſuffice woful *Mordecai*, that found in himſelf the occaſion of all this ſlaughter! what ſoul could be capable of more bitterneſs than he felt! While he could not but think, Wretched man that I am! it is I that have brought all this calamity upon my nation; it is I that have been the ruin of my people! wo is me, that ever I put myſelf into the court, into the ſervice of a Pagan! how unhappy was I to caſt myſelf into theſe ſtraits, that I muſt either

ther honour an *Agagite*, or draw vengeance upon *Iſrael!* yet, how could I imagine, that the flame of *Haman*'s rage would have broken out ſo far! might that revenge have determined in my blood, how happy ſhould I have been! now, I have brought death upon many thouſands of innocents, that cannot know wherefore they die. Why did I not hide myſelf rather from the place of that proud *Amalekite?* why did I ſtand out in conteſtation with ſo over-powerful an enemy? Alas, no man of *Iſrael* ſhall ſo much as live to curſe me, only mine enemies ſhall record my name with ignominy, and ſay, *Mordecai* was the bane of his nation! O that my zeal ſhould have reſerved me for ſo heavy a ſervice! Where now are thoſe vain ambitions, wherewith I pleaſed myſelf in this great match of *Eſther?* how fondly did I hope, by this undue means, to raiſe myſelf and my people! yea, is not this carnal preſumption the quarrel that God hath againſt me? do I not therefore ſmart from theſe Pagans, for that I ſecretly affected this uncircumciſed alliance? Howſoever it be, yet, O God, what have thy people done! O let it be thy juſt mercy, that I may periſh alone!

In theſe ſad thoughts did *Mordecai* ſpend his heart, while he walked mournfully in ſackcloth before that gate wherein he was wont to ſit: now his habit bars his approach, no ſackcloth might come within the court. Lo, that which is welcomeſt in the court of heaven, is here excluded from the preſence of this earthly royalty: *A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not deſpiſe.*

Neither did it a little add to the ſorrow of *Mordecai*, to hear the bitter inſultations of his former monitors: *Did we not adviſe thee better? did we not fore-admoniſh thee of thy danger? ſee now the iſſue of thine obſtinacy:* now ſee, what it is for thine earthen pitcher to knock with braſs. Now, where is the

the man that would needs conteſt with *Haman?* haſt thou not now brought thy maters to a fair paſs? thy ſtomach had long owed thee a ſpite, and now it hath paid thee: who can pity thy wilfulneſs? ſince thou wouldſt needs deride our counſel, we will take leave to laugh at thy ſackcloth. Nothing but ſcorns, and griefs, and terrors, preſent themſelves to miſerable *Mordecai.* All the external buffets of adverſaries were ſlight, to the wounds that he hath made, and felt in his own heart.

The perpetual intelligences, that were cloſely held betwixt *Eſther* and *Mordecai*, could not ſuffer his public ſorrow to be long concealed from her. The news of his ſackcloth afflicts her, ere ſhe can ſuſpect the cauſe; her crown doth but clog her head, while ſhe hears of his aſhes. True friendſhip transforms us into the condition of thoſe we love; and, if it cannot raiſe them to our cheerfulneſs, draws us down to their dejection. Fain would ſhe uncaſe her foſter-father of theſe mournful weeds, and change his ſackcloth for tiſſue; that yet, at leaſt, his clothes might not hinder his acceſs to her preſence, for the free opening of his griefs.

It is but a ſlight ſorrow that abides to take in outward comforts: *Mordecai* refuſes that kind offer, and would have *Eſther* ſee that his affliction was ſuch, as that he might well reſolve to put off his ſackcloth and his ſkin at once; that he muſt mourn to death, rather than ſee her face to live.

The good queen is aſtoniſhed with this conſtant humiliation of ſo dear a friend; and now ſhe ſends *Hatach*, a truſty, though a Pagan attendant, to enquire into the occaſion of this ſo irremediable heavineſs. It ſhould ſeem *Eſther* inquired not greatly into matters of ſtate; that, which perplexed all *Shuſhan*, was not yet known to her: her followers, not knowing her to be a *Jeweſs*, conceived not how the news might

concern her, and therefore had forborn the relation. *Mordecai* firſt informs her, by her meſſenger, of the decree that was gone out againſt all her nation, of the day wherein they muſt all prepare to bleed, of the ſum which *Haman* had proffered for their heads, and delivers the copy of that blöody edict, charging her now, if ever, to beſtir herſelf, and to improve all her love, all her power, with king *Ahaſuerus*, in a ſpeedy and humble ſupplication for the ſaving of the life, not of himſelf, ſo much as of her people.

It was tidings able to confound a weak heart; and her's ſo much the more, as ſhe could apprehend nothing but impoſſibility of redreſs. She needs but to put *Mordecai* in mind of that, which all the king's ſervants and ſubjects knew well enough, that the *Perſian* law made it no leſs than death, for whomſoever, man or woman, that ſhould preſs into the inner court of the king, uncalled. Nothing, but the royal ſceptre extended, could keep that preſumptuous offender from the grave. For her, thirty days were now paſſed, ſiuce ſhe was called in to the king; an intermiſſion, that might be juſtly ſuſpicious, whether the heat of his firſt affection were thus ſoon, of itſelf, allayed towards her; or whether ſome ſuggeſtions of a ſecret enemy, perhaps his *Agagite*, might have ſet him off; or whether ſome more pleaſing object may have laid hold on his eyes: whatever it might be, this abſence could not but argue ſome ſtrangeneſs, and this ſtrangeneſs muſt needs imply a danger in her bold intruſion. She could bewail therefore, ſhe could not hope to remedy this diſmal day of her people. This anſwer in the ears of *Mordecai* founded truth, but weakneſs; neither can he take up with ſo feeble a return: theſe occaſions require other ſpirits, other reſolutions, which muſt be quickened by a more ſtirring reply; *Think not with thyſelf, that thou ſhalt eſcape in the king's houſe, more than all the* Jews; *for, if thou altogether*

gether holdeſt thy peace at this time, then ſhall there enlargement and deliverance ariſe to the Jews *from another place, but thou and thy father's houſe ſhall be deſtroyed; and who knoweth, whether thou art come to the kingdom for ſuch a time as this?*

The expectation of death had not quelled the ſtrong heart of faithful *Mordecai;* even, while he mourns, his zeal droops not; there could have been no life in that breaſt, which this meſſage could not have rouzed.

What then? is it death that thou feareſt in this attempt of thy ſupplication? what other than death awaits thee in the neglect of it? there is but this difference, ſue and thou mayeſt die, ſue not and thou muſt die: what blood haſt thou but *Jewiſh?* and if theſe unalterable edicts exempt no living ſoul, what ſhall become of thine? and canſt thou be ſo vainly timorous, as to die for fear of death? to prefer certainty of danger, before a poſſibility of hope? Away with this weak cowardice, unworthy of an *Iſraelite*, unworthy of a queen. But if faint-heartedneſs, or private reſpects, ſhall ſeal up thy lips, or with-hold thine hand from the aid of thy people; if thou canſt ſo far neglect God's church, know thou that God will not neglect it: it ſhall not be in the power of tyrants to root out his choſen ſeed; that holy One of *Iſrael* ſhall rather work miracles from heaven, than his inheritance ſhall periſh upon earth; and how juſt ſhall it then be for that jealous God, to take vengeance upon thee, and thy father's houſe, for this cold unhelpfulneſs to his diſtreſſed church? Suffer me therefore to adjure thee, by all that tenderneſs of love, wherewith I have trained up thine orphan infancy, by all thoſe dear and thankful reſpects which thou haſt vowed to me again, by the name of the God of *Iſrael* whom we ſerve, that thou awaken and ſtir up thine holy courage, and dare to adventure thy life,

for the ſaving of many: it hath pleaſed the Almighty to raiſe thee up to that height of honour, which our progenitors could little expect; why ſhouldſt thou be wanting to him, that hath been ſo bountiful to thee? yea, why ſhould I not think, that God hath put this very act into the intendment of thine exaltation? having on purpoſe thus ſeaſonably hoiſed thee up to the throne, that thou mayeſt reſcue his poor church from an utter ruin.

O the admirable faith of *Mordecai*, that ſhines through all theſe clouds, and, in the thickeſt of theſe fogs, deſcries a cheerful glimpſe of deliverance! He ſaw the day of their common deſtruction enacted, he knew the *Perſian* decrees to be unalterable, but, withal, he knew there was a *Meſſias* to come; he was ſo well acquainted with God's covenanted aſſurances to his church, that he can, through the midſt of thoſe bloody reſolutions, foreſee indemnity to *Iſrael*, rather truſting the promiſes of God, than the threats of men. This is the victory that overcomes all the fears and fury of the world, even our faith.

It is quarrel enough againſt any perſon, or community, not to have been aidful to the diſtreſſes of God's people. Not to ward the blow, if we may, is conſtrued for little better than ſtriking. Till we have tried our utmoſt, we know not whether we have done that we came for.

Mordecai hath ſaid enough: theſe words have ſo put a new life into *Eſther*, that ſhe is reſolute to hazard the old; *Go gather together all the* Jews *that are preſent in* Shuſhan, *and faſt ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day; I alſo and my maidens will faſt likeways, and ſo will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I periſh, I periſh.* Heroical thoughts do well befit great actions. Life can never be better adventured, than where it ſhall be gain to loſe it.

There

There can be no law againſt the humble deprecation of evils; where the neceſſity of God's church calls to us, no danger ſhould with-hold us from all honeſt means of relief. Deep humiliations muſt make way for the ſucceſs of great enterpriſes; we are moſt capable of mercy, when we are thoroughly empty. A ſhort hunger doth but whet the appetite; but ſo long an abſtinence meets death half way, to prevent it. Well may they enjoin ſharp penances unto others, who practiſe it upon themſelves.

It was the face of *Eſther* that muſt hope to win *Ahaſuerus*, yet that ſhall be macerated with faſting, that ſhe may prevail. A carnal heart would have pampered the fleſh, that it might allure thoſe wanton eyes; ſhe pines it, that ſhe may pleaſe.

God, and not ſhe, muſt work the heart of the king. Faith teaches her rather to truſt her devotions, than her beauty.

CONTEM. VI. ESTHER *ſuing to* AHASUERUS.

THE *Jews* are eaſily intreated to faſt, who had received in themſelves the ſentence of death; what pleaſure could they take in meat, that knew what day they muſt eat their laſt? The three days of abſtinence are expired; now *Eſther* changes her ſpirits, no leſs than her clothes: who, that ſees that face, and that habit, can ſay ſhe had mourned, ſhe had faſted? never did her royal apparel become her ſo well. That God, before whom ſhe had humbled herſelf, made her ſo much more beautiful, as ſhe had been more dejected; and now, with a winning confidence, ſhe walks into the inner court of the king, and puts herſelf into that forbidden preſence; as if ſhe ſaid, Here I am with my life in my hand, if it pleaſe the king to take it, it is ready for him. *Vaſhti*, my predeceſſor, forfeited her place for not coming when

when ſhe was called; *Eſther* ſhall now hazard the forfeiture of her life, for coming when ſhe is not called. It is neceſſity, not diſobedience, that hath put me upon this bold approach; according to thy conſtruction, O king, I do either live or die, either ſhall be welcome. The unexpectedneſs of pleaſing objects makes them many times the more acceptable: the beautiful countenance, the graceful demeanour, and goodly preſence of *Eſther*, have no ſooner taken the eyes, than they have raviſhed the heart of king *Ahaſuerus*: love hath ſoon baniſhed all dreadfulneſs; *And the king held out to* Eſther *the golden ſceptre that was in his hand.* Moderate intermiſſion is ſo far from cooling the affection, that it inflames it. Had *Eſther* been ſeen every day, perhaps that ſatiety had abated of the height of her welcome; now, three and thirty days retiredneſs hath endeared her more to the ſurfeited eyes of *Ahaſuerus*.

Had not the golden ſcepter been held out, where had queen *Eſther* been? The *Perſian* kings affected a ſtern awfulneſs to their ſubjects; it was death to ſolicit them uncalled. How ſafe, how eaſy, how happy a thing it is to have to do with the King of heaven, who is ſo pleaſed with our acceſs, that he ſolicits ſuitors; who, as he is unweariable with our requeſts, ſo is infinite in his beneficences!

How gladly doth *Eſther* touch the top of that ſceptre by which ſhe holds her life! and now, while ſhe thinks it well that ſhe may live, ſhe receives, beſides pardon, favour. *What wilt thou, queen* Eſther, *and what is thy requeſt? it ſhall be given thee, even to the half of the kingdom.* Commonly, when we fear moſt, we ſpeed beſt; God then, moſt of all, magnifies his bounty to us, when we have moſt afflicted ourſelves. Over confident expectations are ſeldom but diſappointed, while humble ſuſpicions go laughing away. It was the benefit and ſafety of

but

but one piece of the kingdom, that *Eſther* comes to ſue for; and behold *Ahaſuerus* offers her the free power of the half. He, that gave *Haman*, at the firſt word, the lives of all his *Jewiſh* ſubjects, is ready to give *Eſther* half his kingdom, ere ſhe aſk. Now ſhe is no leſs amazed at the loving munificence of *Ahaſuerus*, than ſhe was before afraid of his auſterity: *The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; as the rivers of water, he turneth it whitherſoever he will.*

It is not good to ſwallow favours too greedily, leſt they either choke us in the paſſage, or prove hard of digeſtion. The wiſe queen, however ſhe might ſeem to have a fair opportunity offered to her ſuit, finds it not good to apprehend it too ſuddenly, as deſiring, by this ſmall dilation, to prepare the ear and heart of the king for ſo important a requeſt.

Now, all her petition ends in a banquet, *If it ſeem good unto the king, let the king and* Haman *come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him.* It is an eaſy favour to receive a ſmall courteſy, where we offer to give great. *Haman* is called, the king comes to *Eſther*'s table; and now highly pleaſed with his entertainment, he himſelf ſolicits her to propound that ſuit, for which her modeſty would, but durſt not ſolicit him. Baſhfulneſs ſhall loſe nothing at the hand of well-governed greatneſs.

Yet ſtill *Eſther*'s ſuit ſticks in her teeth, and dares not come forth without a further preface of time and expectation; another banquet muſt paſs, ere this reckoning can be given in. Other ſuitors wait long for the delivery of their petition, longer for the receipt of their anſwer. Here the king is fain to wait for his ſuit: whether *Eſther*'s heart would not yet ſerve her to conteſt with ſo ſtrong an adverſary, as *Haman*, without further recollection; or whether ſhe deſired to get better hold of the king, by endearing him

him with ſo pleaſing entertainments; or whether ſhe would thus ripen her hopes, by working in the mind of king *Ahaſuerus* a foreconceit of the greatneſs and difficulty of that ſuit, which was ſo loath to come forth; or whether ſhe meant thus to give ſcope to the pride and malice of *Haman*, for his more certain ruin; howſoever it were, to-morrow is a new day ſet for *Eſther*'s ſecond banquet, and third petition.

The king is not invited without *Haman;* favours are ſometimes done to men with a purpoſe of diſpleaſure: doubtleſs *Haman* taſteth of the ſame cares with his maſter; neither could he, in the forehead of *Eſther*, read any other characters, than of reſpect and kind applauſe, yet had ſhe then in her hopes deſigned him to a juſt revenge. Little do we know, by outward carriages, in what terms we ſtand with either God or man.

Every little wind raiſeth up a bubble; how is *Haman* now exalted in himſelf with the ſingular graces of queen *Eſther;* and begins to value himſelf ſo much more, as he ſees himſelf higher in the rate of others opinion?

Only ſurly and ſullen *Mordecai* is an allay to his happineſs; no edict of death can bow the knees of that ſtout *Jew;* yea the notice of that bloody cruelty of this *Agagite* hath ſtiffened them ſo much the more. Before, he looked at *Haman* as an *Amalekite*, now as a perſecutor. Diſdain and anger look out at thoſe eyes, and bid that proud enemy do his worſt. No doubt *Mordecai* had been liſtening after the ſpeed of queen *Eſther;* how ſhe came in to the king, how ſhe was welcomed with the golden ſceptre, and with the more precious words of *Ahaſuerus;* how ſhe had entertained the king how ſhe pleaſed; the news had made him quit his ſackcloth, and raiſed his courage to a more ſcornful neglect of his profeſſed adverſary.

Haman

Haman comes home, I know not whether more full of pride, or of rage; calls an inward counſel of his choice friends, together with his wife; makes a glorious report of all his wealth, magnificence, height of favour, both with the king and queen; and, at laſt, after all his ſun-ſhine, ſets in this cloudy epilogue, *Yet all this availeth me nothing, ſo long as I ſee* Mordecai *the* Jew *ſitting at the king's gate.* It is ſeldom ſeen, that God allows, even to the greateſt darlings of the world, a perfect contentment; ſomething they muſt have to complain of, that ſhall give an unſavoury verdure to their ſweeteſt morſels, and make their very felicity miſerable.

The wit of women hath wont to be noted for more ſudden, and more ſharp: *Zereſh*, the wife of *Haman*, ſets on foot that motion of ſpeedy revenge, which is applauded by the reſt: *Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to-morrow ſpeak thou to the king, that* Mordecai *may be hanged thereon; then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet.* I do not hear them ſay, Be patient a while; thou haſt already ſet *Mordecai* his laſt day; the month *Adar* will not be long in coming, the determination of his death hath made him deſperate, let him in the mean time eat his own heart in envy at thy greatneſs; but they rather adviſe of a quick diſpatch. Malice is a thing full of impatience, and hates delay of execution, next unto mercy. While any grudge lies at the heart, it cannot be freely cheerful. Forced ſmiles are but the hypocriſy of mirth. How happy were it for us, if we could be ſo zealouſly careful to remove the hinderances of our true ſpiritual joy, thoſe ſtubborn corruptions that will not ſtoop to the power of grace!

CONTEM. VII. MORDECAI *honoured by* HAMAN.

THE wit of *Zereſh* had like to have gone beyond the wit of *Eſther;* had not the working Providence of the Almighty contrived theſe events beyond all hopes, all conceits, *Mordecai* had been diſpatched ere *Eſther*'s ſecond banquet. To-morrow was the day pitched for both their deſigns; had not the ſtream been unexpectedly turned, in vain had the queen blamed her delays, *Mordecai*'s breakfaſt had prevented *Eſther*'s dinner; for certainly he that had given to *Haman* ſo many thouſand lives, would never have made dainty upon the ſame ſuit, to anticipate one of thoſe whom he had condemned to the ſlaughter. But God meant better things to his church, and fetches about all his holy purpoſes, after a wonderful faſhion, in the very inſtant of opportunity. *He that keepeth* Iſrael, *and neither ſlumbereth nor ſleepeth*, cauſeth ſleep that night to depart from him that had decreed to root out *Iſrael*. Great *Ahaſuerus*, that commanded an hundred and ſeven and twenty provinces, cannot command an hour's ſleep. Poverty is rather bleſſed with the freedom of reſt, than wealth and power. Cares and ſurfeit with-hold that from the great, which preſſeth upon the ſpare diet and labour of the meaneſt. Nothing is more tedious than an eager purſuit of denied ſleep, which, like to a ſhadow, flies away ſo much faſter, as it is more followed. Experience tells us, that this benefit is beſt ſolicited by neglect, and ſooneſt found, when we have forgotten to ſeek it.

Whether to deceive the time, or to beſtow it well, *Ahaſuerus* ſhall ſpend his reſtleſs hours in the chronicles of his time. Nothing is more requiſite for princes, than to look back upon their own actions and events, and thoſe of their predeceſſors; the examination

tion of fore-paſt actions makes them wiſe, of events thankful and cautelous.

Amongſt thoſe voluminous regiſters of acts and monuments, which ſo many ſcores of provinces muſt needs yield, the book ſhall open upon *Mordecai*'s diſcovery of the late treaſon of the two eunuchs: the reader is turned thither, by an inſenſible ſway of Providence. Our moſt arbitrary or caſual actions are over-ruled by a hand in heaven.

The king now feels afreſh the danger of that conſpiracy; and, as great ſpirits abide not to ſmother or bury good offices, inquires into the recompenſe of ſo royal a ſervice; *What honour and dignity hath been done to* Mordecai *for this?* Surely *Mordecai* did but his duty; he had heinouſly ſinned, if he had not revealed this wicked treachery; yet *Ahaſuerus* takes thought for his remuneration. How much more careful art thou, O God of all mercies, to reward the weak obedience of thine (at the beſt) unprofitable ſervants!

That which was intended to procure reſt, ſets it off: king *Ahaſuerus* is unquiet in himſelf, to think that ſo great a merit ſhould ly but ſo long neglected; neither can he find any peace in himſelf, till he have given order for a ſpeedy retribution: hearing therefore by his ſervants, that *Haman* was below in the court, he ſends for him up to conſult with him, *What ſhould be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour?* O marvellous concurrence of circumſtances, drawn together by the infinite wiſdom and power of the Almighty! Who but *Haman* ſhould be the man? and when ſhould *Haman* be called to adviſe of *Mordecai*'s honour, but in the very inſtant when he came to ſue for *Mordecai*'s hanging! Had *Ahaſuerus* but ſlept that night, *Mordecai* had been that morning advanced fifty cubits higher than the earth, ere the

king could have remembered to whom he was beholden.

What ſhall we ſay then to reconcile theſe croſs-paſſions in *Ahaſuerus!* Before he ſigned that decree of killing all the *Jews*, he could not but know that a *Jew* had ſaved his life; and now, after that he had enacted the ſlaughter of all *Jews* as rebels, he is giving order to honour a *Jew* as his preſerver. It were ſtrange, if great perſons, in the multitude of their diſtractions, ſhould not let fall ſome incongruities.

Yet, who can but think that king *Ahaſuerus* meant, upon ſome ſecond thoughts, to make amends to *Mordecai?* neither can he chuſe but put theſe two together; the *Jews* are appointed to death at the ſuit of *Haman;* this *Mordecai* is a *Jew:* how then can I do more grace to him that hath ſaved my life, than to command him to be honoured by that man who would ſpill his?

When *Haman* heard himſelf called up to the bed-chamber of his maſter, he thinks himſelf too happy, in ſo early an opportunity of preſenting his ſuit; but yet more in the pleaſing queſtion of *Ahaſuerus*, wherein he could not but imagine, that favour forced itſelf upon him with ſtrange importunity: for how could he conceive, that any intention of more than ordinary honour could fall beſides himſelf? Self-love, like to a good ſtomach, draws to itſelf what nouriſhment it likes, and caſts off that which offends it. *Haman* will be ſure to be no niggard in adviſing thoſe ceremonies of honour, which he thinks meant to his own perſon. Could he have once dreamed, that this grace had been purpoſed to any under heaven, beſides himſelf, he had not been ſo laviſh in counſelling ſo pompous a ſhow of exceſſive magnificence. Now the king's own royal apparel, and his own ſteed is not ſufficient, except the royal crown alſo make up the glory of him who ſhall thus triumph in the king's favour; yet all

this

this were nothing in baſe hands. The actor ſhall be the beſt part of this great pageant. *Let this apparel, and this horſe, be delivered to one of the king's moſt noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horſeback through the ſtreets of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus ſhall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.* Honour is more in him that gives, than him that receives it. To be honoured by the unworthy is little better than diſgrace: no meaner perſon will ſerve to attend this *Agagite*, in his ſuppoſed greatneſs, than one of the nobleſt princes. The ambition is too high-flown, that ſeeks glory in the ſervility of equals.

The place adds much to the act; there is ſmall heart in a concealed honour: it is nothing, unleſs the ſtreets of the city of *Shuſhan* be witneſſes of this pomp, and ring with that gracious acclamation.

The vain hearts of proud men can eaſily deviſe thoſe means whereby they may beſt ſet out themſelves. O that we would equally affect the means of true and immortal glory! The heart of man is never ſo cold within him, as when, from the height of the expectation of good, it falls into a ſudden ſenſe of evil: ſo did this *Agagite*. *Then the king ſaid to* Haman, *make haſte, and take the apparel, and the horſe, as thou haſt ſaid, and do even ſo to* Mordecai *the* Jew, *that ſitteth at the king's gate; let nothing fail of all that thou haſt ſaid.* How was *Haman* thunder-ſtricken with this killing word! *Do thou ſo to* Mordecai. I dare ſay, all the honours that *Ahaſuerus* had heaped upon *Haman* cannot countervail this one vexation. Doubtleſs, at firſt, he diſtruſts his ear, and then muſes whether the king be in earneſt; at laſt, when he hears the charge ſo ſeriouſly doubled, and finds himſelf forced to believe it, he begins to think, What means this unconceivable alteration? Is there

there no man in all the court of *Perſia*, to be picked out for extraordinary honour, but *Mordecai?* is there no man to be picked out, for the performance of this honour to him, but *Haman?* have I but one proud enemy in all the world, and am I ſingled out to grace him? did it gall me to the heart, and make all my happineſs tedious to me, to ſee that this *Jew* would not bow to me, and muſt I now bow to him? That which he would rather die, and forfeit the life of all his nation, than do to me, notwithſtanding the king's command, ſhall I be forced, by the king's command, to do unto him? Yea, did he refuſe to give but a cap and a knee to my greatneſs; and muſt I laquey ſo baſe a fellow through the ſtreets? muſt I be his herald, to proclaim his honour through all *Shuſhan?* Why do I not let the king know the inſolent affronts that he hath offered me? why do I not ſignify to my ſovereign, that my errand now was for another kind of advancement to *Mordecai?* If I obtain not my deſired revenge, yet, at leaſt, I ſhall prevail ſo far, as to exempt myſelf from this officious attendance upon ſo unequal an enemy. And yet that motion cannot be now ſafe; I ſee the king's heart is, upon what ground ſoever, bent upon this action; ſhould I fly off never ſo little, after my word ſo directly paſſed, perhaps my coldneſs or oppoſition might be conſtrued as ſome wayward conteſtation with my maſter; eſpecially ſince the ſervice that *Mordecai* hath done to the king is of an higher nature, than the deſpite which he hath done to me. I will, I muſt give way for the time; mine humble yieldance, when all the carriage of this buſineſs ſhall be underſtood, ſhall, I doubt not, make way for mine intended revenge. *Mordecai*, I will honour thee now, that by theſe ſteps I may ere long raiſe thee many cubits higher. I will obey the command of my ſovereign in obſerving thee, that he may reward the merit of my loyalty in thine execution.

Thus

Thus reſolved, *Haman* goes forth with a face and heart full of diſtraction, full of confuſion; and addreſſes himſelf to the attiring, to the attending of his old adverſary, and new maſter, *Mordecai*. What looks, do we now think, were caſt upon each other, at their firſt greeting? their eyes had not forgotten their old language: certainly, when *Mordecai* ſaw *Haman* come into the room where he was, he could not but think, this man hath long thirſted for my blood, and now he comes to fetch it; I ſhall not live to ſee the ſucceſs of *Eſther*, or the fatal day of my nation. It was known, that morning in the court, what a lofty gibbet *Haman* had provided for *Mordecai;* and why might it not have come to *Mordecai*'s ear? what could he therefore now imagine other, than that he was called out to that execution? But, when he ſaw the royal robe that *Haman* brought to him, he thinks, is it not enough for this man to kill me, but he muſt mock me too! what an addition is this to the former cruelty, thus to inſult, and play upon my laſt diſtreſs! But, when he yet ſaw the royal crown ready to be ſet on his head, and the king's own horſe, richly furniſhed, at his gate, and found himſelf raiſed by princely hands into that royal ſeat, he thinks, What may all this mean? is it the purpoſe of mine adverſary, that I ſhall die in ſtate? would he have me hanged in triumph? At laſt, when he ſees ſuch a train of *Perſian* peers attending him, with a grave reverence, and hears *Haman* proclaim before him, *Thus ſhall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour:* finding this pomp to be ſerious and well meant, he imagines, in all likelihood, that this unexpected change proceeds from the ſuit of his *Eſther;* now he begins to lift up his head, and to hope well of himſelf, and his people, and could not but ſay within himſelf, that he had not faſted for nothing. O the wondrous alteration that one morning hath made in the court of *Perſia!* He that

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was yeſternight deſpiſed by *Haman*'s footmen, is now waited on by *Haman*, and all his fellow princes: he, that yeſternight had the homage of all knees but one, and was ready to burſt for the lack of that, now doth obeiſance to that one by whom he was wilfully neglected: it was not *Ahaſuerus* that wrought this ſtrange mutation, it was the over-ruling power of the Almighty, whoſe immediate hand would thus prevent *Eſther*'s ſuit, that he might challenge all the thank to himſelf: while princes have their own wills, they muſt do his; and ſhall either exalt or depreſs according to divine appointment.

I ſhould commend *Haman*'s obedience, in his humble condeſcent to ſo unpleaſing and harſh a command of his maſter, were it not, that either he durſt do no other, or that he thus ſtooped for an advantage. It is a thankleſs reſpect that is either forced, or for ends. True ſubjection is free and abſolute, out of the conſcience of duty, not out of fears or hopes.

All *Shuſhan* is in amaze at this ſudden glory of *Mordecai*, and ſtudies how to reconcile this day with the thirteenth of *Adar*. *Mordecai* had reaſon to hope well; it could not ſtand with the honour of the king, to kill him whom he ſaw cauſe to advance; neither could this be any other, than the beginning of a durable promotion; otherways, what recompenſe had an hour's riding been to ſo great a ſervice?

On the other ſide, *Haman* droops, and hath changed paſſions with *Mordecai*: neither was that *Jew* ever more deeply afflicted with the decree of his own death, than this *Agagite* was with that *Jew*'s honour. How heavy doth it ly at *Haman*'s heart, that no tongue, but his, might ſerve to proclaim *Mordecai* happy! Even the greateſt mignions of the world muſt have their turns of ſorrow.

With a covered head, and a dejected countenance, doth he haſten home, and longs to impart his grief, where

where he had received his advice. It was but cold comfort that he finds from his wife *Zereſh*, and his friends: *If* Mordecai *be of the ſeed of the* Jews, *before whom thou haſt begun to fall, thou ſhalt not prevail againſt him, but ſhalt ſurely fall before him.* Out of the mouth of Pagans, O God, thou haſt ordained ſtrength, that thou mayſt ſtill the enemy and the avenger. What credit hath thy great name won with theſe barbarous nations, that they can, out of all experience, make maxims of thine undoubted protection of thy people, and the certain ruin of their adverſaries? Men find no difference in themſelves; the face of a *Jew* looks ſo like other mens, that *Eſther* and *Mordecai* were not, of long, taken for what they were: he, that made them, makes the diſtinction betwixt them; ſo as a *Jew* may fall before a *Perſian*, and get up and prevail; but if a *Perſian*, or whoſoever of the Gentiles, begin to fall before a *Jew*, he can neither ſtay nor riſe. There is an inviſible hand of omnipotency that ſtrikes in for his own, and confounds their oppoſites. O God, neither is thine hand ſhortened, nor thy bowels ſtraitened in thee: thou art ſtill and ever thyſelf. If we be thy true ſpiritual *Iſrael*, neither earth nor hell ſhall prevail againſt us; we ſhall either ſtand ſure, or ſurely riſe, while our enemies ſhall lick the duſt.

CONTEM. VIII. HAMAN *hanged*, MORDECAI *advanced.*

HAMAN's day is now come; that vengeance which hath hitherto ſlept is now awake, and rouzeth up itſelf to a juſt execution; that heavy morning was but the preface to his laſt ſorrow, and the ſad preſage of friends is verified in the ſpeaking; while the word was in their mouths, the meſſengers were at the door to fetch *Haman* to his funeral banquet.

How little do we know what is towards us! As the fiſhes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the ſnare, ſo are the ſons of men ſnared in evil time, when it falleth ſuddenly upon them.

It was, as *Haman* conceived, the only privilege of his dearneſs, and the comfort of his preſent heavineſs, that he only was called with the king to *Eſther*'s banquet, when this only was meant for his bane. The face of this invitation was fair, and promiſeth much; and now the ingenuous man begins to ſet good conſtructions upon all events. Surely, thinks he, the king was tied in his honour to give ſome public gratification to *Mordecai;* ſo good an office could deſerve no leſs than an hour's glory: but little doth my maſter know what terms there are betwixt me and *Mordecai;* had he fully underſtood the inſolencies of this *Jew*, and ſhould, notwithſtanding, have enjoined me to honour him, I might have had juſt cauſe to complain of diſgrace and diſparagement; but now, ſince all this buſineſs hath been carried in ignorance and caſualty, why do I wrong myſelf in being too much affected with that which was not ill meant? had either the king or the queen abated ought of their favour to me, I might have dined at home, now this renewed invitation argues me to ſtand right in the grace of both; and why may not I hope this day to meet with a good occaſion of my deſired revenge? how juſt will it ſeem to the king, that the ſame man, whom he hath publicly rewarded for his loyalty, ſhould now be publicly puniſhed for his diſobedience?

With ſuch like thoughts *Haman* cheers up himſelf, and addreſſeth himſelf to the royal banquet, with a countenance that would fain ſeem to forget his morning's taſk: *Eſther* works her face to an unwilling ſmile upon that hateful gueſt; and the king, as not unguilty of any dignity that he hath put upon his favourite,

rite, frames himſelf to as much cheerfulneſs as his want of reſt would permit. The table is royally furniſhed with all delicate confections, with all pleaſing liquors. King *Ahaſuerus* ſo eats, as one that both knew he was, and meant to make himſelf welcome: *Haman* ſo pours in, as one that meant to drown his cares; and now, in this fulneſs of cheer, the king hungers for that long delayed ſuit of queen *Eſther;* thrice hath he graciouſly called for it, and, as a man conſtant to his own favours, thrice hath he, in the ſame words, vowed the performance of it, though to the half of his kingdom. It falls out oftentimes, that, when large promiſes fall ſuddenly from great perſons, they abate by leiſure, and ſhrink upon cold thoughts; here *Ahaſuerus* is not more liberal in his offer than firm in his reſolutions, as if his firſt word had been, like his law, unalterable. I am aſhamed to miſs that ſteadineſs in Chriſtians, which I find in a Pagan. It was a great word that he had ſaid, yet he eats it not, as over laviſhly ſpoken, but doubles and triples it with hearty aſſurances of a real proſecution; while thoſe tongues, which profeſs the true God, ſay and unſay at pleaſure, recanting their good purpoſes, contradicting their own juſt engagements, upon no cauſe but their own changeableneſs.

It is not for queen *Eſther* to drive off any longer; the ſame wiſdom that taught her to defer her ſuit, now teaches her to propound it: a well choſen ſeaſon is the greateſt advantage of any action, which, as it is ſeldom found in haſte, ſo is too often loſt in delay. Now, therefore, with an humble and graceful obeiſance, and with a countenance full of modeſt fear and ſad gravity, ſhe ſo delivers her petition, that the king might ſee, it was neceſſity that both forced it upon her, and wrung it from her. *If I have found favour in thy ſight, O king, and if it pleaſe the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at*

my requeſt. Expectation is either a friend or an enemy, according to the occaſion: *Ahaſuerus* looked for ſome high and difficult boon; now that he hears his queen beg for her life, it could not be but that the ſurpluſage of his love to her muſt be turned into fury againſt her adverſary; and his zeal muſt be ſo much more to her, as her ſuit was more meek and humble. *For we are ſold, I and my people, to be deſtroyed, to be ſlain, and to periſh; but, if we had been ſold for bondmen, and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.* Crafty men are ſometimes choked with their own plots. It was the proffer of ten thouſand talents wherewith *Haman* hoped both to purchaſe his intended revenge, and the reputation of a worthy patriot; that ſum is now laid in his diſh, for a juſt argument of malicious corruption: for well might *Eſther* plead, If we *Jews* deſerved death, what needed our ſlaughter to be bought out? and if we deſerved it not, what horrible cruelty was it to ſet a price upon innocent blood? it is not any offence of ours, it is only the deſpite of an enemy that hath wrought our deſtruction.

Beſides, now it appears the king was abuſed by miſinformation: the adverſary ſuggeſted, that the life of the *Jews* could not ſtand with the king's profit; whereas their very bondage ſhould be more damage to the ſtate, than all *Haman*'s worth could countervail. Truth may be ſmothered, but it cannot die; it may be diſguiſed, but it will be known; it may be ſuppreſſed, but it will triumph.

But what ſhall we ſay to ſo harſh an aggravation? Could *Eſther* have been ſilent in a caſe of decreed bondage, who is now ſo vehement in a caſe of death? Certainly, to a generous nature, death is far more eaſy than bondage; why would ſhe have endured the greater, and yet ſo abhors the leſs? was it for that the

Jews

Jews were already too well inured to captivity, and thoſe evils are more tolerable wherewith we are acquainted? or, was it for that there may be hopes in bondage, none in death? ſurely either of them were lamentable, and ſuch as might deſerve her humbleſt deprecation.

The queen was going on to have ſaid, But, alas! nothing will ſatisfy our bloody enemy, ſave the utter extirpation of me and my nation: when the impatient rage of the king interrupts her ſentence in the midſt, and, as if he had heard too much already, and could eaſily ſupply the reſidue of her complaint, ſnatches the word out of her mouth with a furious demand; *Who is he, and where is he, that durſt preſume in his heart to do ſo?* It was the intereſt of queen *Eſther*'s perſon that raiſed this ſtorm in *Ahaſuerus*; ſet that aſide, how quietly, how merrily was the determined maſſacre of the *Jews* formerly digeſted! Actions have not the ſame face, when we look upon them with contrary affections.

Now queen *Eſther* muſters up her inward forces, and, with an undaunted courage, fixing her angry eyes upon that hated *Agagite*, ſhe ſays, *The adverſary and enemy is this wicked* Haman. The word was loath to come forth, but it ſtrikes home at the laſt. Never till now did *Haman* hear his true title; before, ſome had ſtyled him noble, others great; ſome magnificent, and ſome perhaps virtuous; only *Eſther* gives him his own, *Wicked* Haman. Ill-deſerving greatneſs doth in vain promiſe to itſelf a perpetuity of applauſe. If our ways be foul, the time ſhall come, when, after all vain flattery, after all our momentary glory, our ſins ſhall be ript up, and our iniquities laid before us, to our utter confuſion. With what conſternation did *Haman* now ſtand? how do we think he looked to hear himſelf thus enſtyled, thus accuſed, yea thus condemned! certainly, death

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was in his face, and horror in every of his joints; no ſenſe, no limb knows his office: fain would he ſpeak, but his tongue faulters, and his lips tremble; fain would he make apologies upon his knees, but his heart fails him, and tells him, the evidence is too great, and the offence above all pardon: only guiltineſs and fear look through his eyes upon the enraged countenance of his maſter, which now bodes nothing to him but revenge and death.

In what a paſſionate diſtemper doth this banquet ſhut up! King *Ahaſuerus* flies from the table, as if he had been hurried away with a tempeſt. His wrath is too great to come forth at his mouth; only his eyes tell *Haman* that he hates to ſee him, and vows to ſee his diſpatch. For ſolitarineſs, and not for pleaſure, doth he now walk into his garden, and thinks with himſelf, What a monſter have I favoured? is it poſſible that ſo much cruelty and preſumption ſhould harbour in a breaſt that I thought ingenuous? could I be ſo bewitched, as to paſs ſo bloody a decree? is my credulity thus abuſed by the treacherous ſubtilty of a miſcreant whom I truſted? I confeſs it was my weak raſhneſs to yield unto ſo prodigious a motion, but it was the villany of this *Agagite* to circumvent me by falſe ſuggeſtions: he ſhall pay for my error; the world ſhall ſee, that as I exceeded in grace, ſo I will not come ſhort in juſtice. *Haman*, thy guilty blood ſhall expiate that innocent blood, which thy malice might have ſhed.

In the mean time, *Haman*, ſo ſoon as ever he could recover the qualm of his aſtoniſhment, finding himſelf left alone with queen *Eſther*, loſeth no time, ſpareth no breath to mitigate her anger, which had made way to his deſtruction. Doubtleſs, with many vows and tears, and ſolemn oaths, he labours to clear his intentions to her perſon, bewailing his danger, imploring her mercy, confeſſing the unjuſt extent of his malice,

malice, proffering endeavours of ſatisfaction. Wretched man that I am, I am condemned before I ſpeak, and when I have ſpoken, I am condemned. Upon thy ſentence, O queen, I ſee death waits for me; in vain ſhall I ſeek to avoid it: it is thy will that I ſhould periſh; but let that little breath I have left, acquit me ſo far with thee, as to call heaven and earth to record, that, in regard of thee, I die innocent. It is true, that mine impetuous malice miſcarried me againſt the nation of the Jews, for the ſake of one ſtubborn offender; but did I know there was the leaſt drop of *Iſraelitiſh* blood in thy ſacred perſon? could I ſuſpect that *Mordecai*, or that people, did ought concern thee? Let not one death be enough for me, if I would ever have entertained any thought of evil againſt nation or man, that ſhould have coſt but a frown from thee. All the court of *Perſia* can ſufficiently witneſs, how I have magnified and adored thee, ever ſince the royal crown was ſet on thy head; neither did I ever fail to do thee all good offices unto that my ſovereign maſter, whom thou haſt now mortally incenſed againſt me. O queen, no hand can ſave my life, but thine, that hath as good as bereaved it; ſhew mercy to him, that never meant but loyalty to thee. As ever thou wouldſt oblige an humble and faithful vaſſal to thee, as ever thou wouldſt honour thy name and ſex, with the praiſe of tender compaſſion, take pity upon me, and ſpare that life which ſhall be vowed to thy ſervice; and whereas thy diſpleaſure may juſtly alledge againſt me that rancorous plot for the extirpation of that people, whom I, too late, know to be thine, let it ſuffice that I hate, I curſe mine own cruelty, and only upon that condition ſhall beg the reprival of my life, that I ſhall work and procure, by thy gracious aid, a full defeaſance of that unjuſt execution. O let fall upon thy

thy deſpairing ſervant one word of favour to my diſpleaſed maſter, that I may yet live.

While he was ſpeaking to this purpoſe, having proſtrate himſelf, for the more humility, before the queen, and ſpread his arms in a vehement imploration up to her bed, the king comes in, and, as not unwilling to miſconſtrue the poſture of him whom he now hated, ſays, *What, will he force the queen alſo before me in the houſe?* That which *Haman* meant as an humble ſupplicant, is interpreted as from a preſumptuous offender: how oft might he have done ſo, and more, while he was in favour, uncenſured! Actions are not the ſame when the man alters. As charity makes a good ſenſe of doubtful occurrents, ſo prejudice and diſpleaſure take all things, though well meant, at the worſt. It is an eaſy thing to pick a quarrel, where we intend a miſchief.

The wrath of the king is as a meſſenger of death. While theſe words were yet in the mouth of *Ahaſuerus*, *Haman*, in turning his head towards the king, is ſuddenly muffled for his execution: he ſhall no more ſee either face or ſun; he ſhall be ſeen no more but as a ſpectacle of ſhame and horror: and now he thinks, Wo is me, whoſe eyes ſerve me only to foreſee the approach of a diſhonourable and painful death! What am I the better to have been great? O that I had never been, O that I could not be! How too truly have *Zereſh*, and my friends, foretold me of this heavy deſtiny! Now am I ready to feel, what it is that I meant to thouſands of innocents; I ſhall die with pain and ignominy. O that the conſcience of mine intended murder could die with me. It is no marvel, if wicked men find nothing but utter diſcomforts in their end: rather than fail, their former happineſs ſhall join with their imminent miſeries, to torment them. It is the juſt judgment of God, that preſumptuous ſinners ſhould be ſwallowed up of thoſe evils, which

which they would not fear. Happy is that man who hath grace to foreſee, and avoid thoſe ways which will lead him to a perfect confuſion. Happy is he that hath ſo lived, that he can either welcome death as a friend, or defy it as an enemy.

Who was ever the better for favour paſt? Thoſe, that had before kiſſed the feet and ſmiled in the face of *Haman*, are now as ready to cover his head, and help him to the gallows. *Harbonah*, one of the chamberlains, ſeaſonably tells the king, how ſtately a gibbet *Haman* had newly ſet up for well-deſerving *Mordecai*, within his own palace.

I hear not one man open his mouth to interceed for the offender, to pacify the king, to excuſe or leſſen the fact: every one is ready to pull him down that is falling, to trample on him that is down; yet, no doubt, there were ſome of theſe courtiers whom *Haman* had obliged: had the cauſe been better, thus it would have been. Every cur is ready to fall upon the dog that he ſees worried; but here, it was the juſt hand of God to ſet off all hearts from a man that had been ſo unreaſonably mercileſs, and to raiſe up enemies, even among friends, to him that had profeſſed enmity to God's church: ſo let thine enemies periſh, O Lord, unſuccoured, unpitied. *Then the king ſaid, Hang him thereon.* There can be no truer juſtice than in retaliation: who can complain of his own meaſure? *Behold the wicked travelleth with iniquity, and hath conceived miſchief, and brought forth falſhood. He made a pit and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch that he made; his miſchief ſhall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing ſhall come down upon his own pate.*

There hangs *Haman*, in more reproach than ever he ſtood in honour; and *Mordecai*, who is now firſt known for what he was, ſucceeds his favour, and changes inheritances with his enemy; for while *Ha-*

man inherits the gibbet of *Mordecai*, *Mordecai* inherits the houſe and honour of *Haman*. *O Lord, let the malice of the wicked come to an end, but eſtabliſh thou the juſt.*

One hour hath changed the face of the *Perſian* court; what ſtability is there in earthly greatneſs? He, who in the morning all knees bowed unto, as more than a man, now hangs up like a deſpiſed vermin, for a prey to the ravens: he, who this morning was deſtined to the gallows, now rules over princes; neither was it for nothing, that he this day rode in triumph. The king's ring that was taken from *Haman*, is now given to *Mordecai*, as the pledge of his authority; and he, that even now ſat in the gate, is called up next to the throne. Wickedneſs and honeſt innocence have now paid their debts to both their clients.

Little joy would it yet have been to *Eſther*, that her enemy was dead, her kinſman advanced, if ſtill her people muſt for all this expect their fatal day; her next ſuit therefore is for the ſafety of her nation, in the countermand of that bloody decree which *Haman* had obtained againſt them: that which was ſurreptitiouſly gotten, and raſhly given, is ſo much more gladly reverſed, by how much mercy is more pleaſing to a good nature than cruel injuſtice. *Mordecai* hath power to indite, ſeal, ſend out letters of favour to the *Jews*, which were cauſeleſsly ſentenced to the ſlaughter. If a *Perſian* law might not be reverſed, yet it might be counterchanged. *Mordecai* may not write, *Let no* Jew *be ſlain;* he may write, *Let the* Jews *meet, and ſtand for their lives againſt thoſe that would ſlay them.* This command flies after the former ſo faſt, as if it would overtake that which it cannot recal. The *Jews* are revived with theſe happy tidings, that they may have protection as well as enmity, that

authority

authority will not be their executioner, that their own hands are allowed to be their avengers.

Who would imagine, that after public notice of this alteration at the court, when the world could not chuſe but know the malicious ground of that wrongful edict, the ſhameful death of the procurer, the power of the party oppoſite, any one ſhould be found, throughout all the provinces, that would once lift up his hand againſt a *Jew*, that, with his own danger, would endeavour to execute a controlled decree? The church of God ſhould ceaſe to be itſelf, if it wanted malicious perſecution: there needs no other quarrel than the name, the religion of *Iſrael*.

Notwithſtanding the known favour of the king, and the patronage of *Mordecai*, the thirteenth of *Adar* is meant to be a bloody day: *Haman* hath too many abettors in the *Perſian* dominions; theſe join together to perform that ſentence, whereof the author repented. The *Jews* take heart to defend themſelves, to kill their murderers. All the provinces are turned into a field of civil war, wherein innocence vanquiſheth malice. The *Jews* are victors, and not only are alive, but are feared; the moſt reſiſt them not, many aſſiſt them, and ſome become theirs. The countenance of the great leads the world at pleaſure; fear of authority ſways thouſands that are not guilty of a conſcience.

Yea, beſides the liberty of defence, the *Jews* are now made their own juſtices: that there may be none left from the loins of that accurſed *Agagite*, who would have left none of the *Jewiſh* ſeed, they ſlay the ten ſons of *Haman*, and obtain new days of further executions: neither can death ſatisfy their revenge, thoſe ten ſons of *Haman* ſhall, in their very carcaſes, bear the reproach of their father, and hang aloft upon his gallows.

Finally,

Finally, no man doth, no man dares frown upon a *Jew;* they are now become lords in the midſt of their captivity: no marvel if they ordain and celebrate their joyful Purim, for a perpetual memory, to all poſterities, of their happy deliverance. It were pity that the church of God ſhould not have ſunſhines as well as ſtorms, and ſhould not meet with interchanges of joy in their warfare, before they enter upon the unchangeable joy of their endleſs triumph.

End of VOLUME SECOND.

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29 AP 92
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